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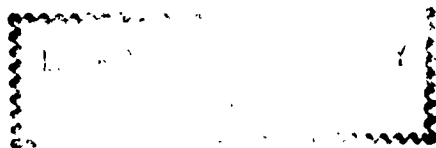
A SEMI-HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE EXPLOITS
AND EXPLOITATIONS OF THE FAR-FAMED BARR
COLONISTS, WHO, LED BY AN UNSCRUPULOUS CHURCH
OF ENGLAND PARSON, ADVENTURED DEEP INTO THE
WILDERNESS OF CANADA'S GREAT NORTH-WEST IN
THE EARLY DAYS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By
HARRY PICK
(Barr Colonist)



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TORONTO

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To

ALL BARR COLONISTS, PARTICULARLY THOSE
WHO AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS ARE STILL
STAYING WITH OLD BRITANNIA, AND TO
THE MEMORY OF THOSE BRAVE SPIRITS WHO
HAVE PASSED ON, THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED

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Extract from the Montreal Gazette of April 11th, 1903

"ST. JOHN, N.B.—Four special trains, carrying the Barr Colonists, numbering 1,960, left here to-day for the Saskatoon district, where the new Canadians will establish homes and cities. The party, which is declared to be the greatest emigration from England since the departure of William Penn, arrived Saturday morning on the steamship *Lake Manitoba*, whose cargo of humanity was packed like fish in a box. The colonists bring with them half a million pounds sterling. They are probably the finest body of men, women and children that ever landed here. Lawyers, doctors, clergymen, merchants, aristocrats, farmers, clerks, artisans, domestics, tradeswomen and labourers are included, besides babies by the score. On the passage, which occupied eleven days, there was not a death or a case of serious illness on the congested ship. Rev. I. M. Barr, the organizer of the party, is a brisk, business-like man, who is full of enthusiasm over the prospects of his scheme. He says 1,500 more colonists are to follow, and that 10,000 will come next year."

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WHEN the S.S. *Lake Manitoba* carried two thousand all-British Barr Colonists across the Atlantic a quarter of a century ago, she didn't exactly cover herself with glory. Her Board of Trade passenger rating was eight hundred odd.

In one cabin for'ard there were packed three hundred human beings—single men; or what practically amounted to the same thing (as a facetious wag whose wife had run off with the milkman put it)—married men travelling without their wives.

A similar cabin aft enclosed a like number of males. Amidships, but a story or two higher up, the steerage accommodation was crowded with unattached females and married people with their younger children. Recently used as a transport in the South African War, the *Lake Manitoba* had had her decks and holds painted a snowy white, and divided into compartments with gunny sacking. Into numbers of these elastic cubicles as many as six married couples were squeezed.

Privacy was impossible. No one could undress properly. The drinking water was rotten; the food was worse. The sanitary conveniences would have shamed a monkey cage. The snow-white paint on the woodwork turned out to be merely whitewash,

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and, when the vessel received a smart smack from a wave, large flakes of it fell off along with the dried undercoat of manure.

Up above, the aristocrats travelled first-class. Theirs was the only passenger accommodation the ship really possessed. Nearly everyone aboard could have afforded to travel cabin, but only those whose applications were received first managed to secure the limited number of berths available. The rest—about sixteen hundred of them—put up with the crudest of steerage fare.

For an interesting view of life aboard an emigrant ship, the single men's cabin for'ard was unique. All sorts and conditions of British middle-class homes were represented, and although it was rather a lot of men to cram into one room, it speaks well for British love of law and order to record that only eleven fights, seven incipient mutinies, three riots, and twenty-two violent interviews with Barr, the party's leader, occurred during the voyage.

This cabin was deep down below the water line. When any of the fellows felt that they needed air, they went up on deck for it. Quite right, too. Why should young single men have things carried down to them?

Climbing to the deck for air worked all right for everybody except those who were dying from seasickness, of whom there were about a score. These poor devils stuck in bed throughout the whole of the voyage. Fortunately, the ship crossed in

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twelve days, so they didn't have to breathe the same air above a million times.

This cabin stretched clean across the boat. It was one of the holds. As previously stated, it was well up in front, where the men got a longer ride for their money—up and down, as well as forward. The "beds" were in tiers of three, with long tables placed with charming thoughtfulness down the aisles, so that the seasick sufferers might obtain a clear view of the grub.

The occupants of the cabin were pretty quiet during the first couple of days out from Liverpool. The band on the dock had played some haunting melodies, and everyone knows how greatly young single men are affected by such things. Besides, there was only an old plank floor separating them from the place where the bilge was stored.

But presently they became more sprightly. Some chap started a little hymn singing, in between two tiers of bunks where a couple of fellows lay dying. It was highly pathetic. One of the invalids, a little, sallow-faced beggar, was in frightful throes; but, in spite of being almost a goner, he revived sufficiently to curse something awful every time the glee singers struck up "Shall We Gather at the River?"

Across in one corner, a gang played ha'penny nap throughout the trip. Bottles of Guinness, like labelled black ninepins, stuck up all round them. Everyone in the cabin smoked, of course; thus any

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germs propagated by the overcrowding were quickly choked to death.

About half-way along one side of the stateroom, a dozen budding scalp hunters had crucified the effigy of a man—Barr, it was supposed to represent—on the wall of the ship, and were practising knife throwing. Many men wore bowie knives. Indeed, barring bows and arrows and 8-inch howitzers, they had brought almost a complete arsenal aboard. No man who considered himself sane would dream of venturing into the Far West in those days without being thoroughly armed, so why shouldn't a green Englishman protect himself?

In the middle of the cabin, in a sort of island of space—which the authorities had apparently overlooked—an orchestra practised many times daily. Two fiddles, a melodeon, a cornet, and a telescopic harmonium ground out the music.

Those were the days before civilization had sunk into the depravity of jazz. The orchestra dispensed such noble airs as: "Count Your Blessings," "Daddy's on the Engine," and such like popular tunes of the day, interspersed with a few of Lottie Collins' and Moody and Sankey's special hits. Some of the dying men frequently called for encores. These were hardly ever refused.

In another corner, a chap, who several years previously had spent three weeks in Alaska, lectured on prairie farming. His dialect was pure Tyneside. It was hard work for him, particularly during

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orchestra rehearsals, but he managed quite well in the intervals.

Those who have heard the Tyneside idiom will know it for a rather desperate affair. In the best society, the vowels are supposed to be sung as limpidly as possible, the consonants being thrown in here and there in shovelfuls of gutturals. As no one understood a single word the lecturer said, he was extremely impressive.

Mixed in with these more artistic entertainments were the usual English gymnastic games; boxing and wrestling; miniature rifle practice, and a few real scraps. Time, therefore, didn't really hang. The dying men appeared to be wonderfully bucked.

Numbers of the men had recently been demobilized from the British Army's South African forces, so the language used in course of ordinary conversation was naturally somewhat vivid.

The largeness of the crowd of passengers had apparently taken the steamship company (The Elder-Dempster Company) unawares, their kitchen staff being completely overwhelmed. The Captain soon rectified this, however, by enlisting, in return for a free passage, a number of stewards from the single men's "stateroom." These, not having had much experience in dealing with riots and revolutions, were quite content to stand in the cabin entrance and shy jacketed potatoes, slices of meat, and chunks of plum duff across the heads of the

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scrambling crowds. Only good all-round cricketers were chosen for stewards; and only first-rate wicket-keepers got plenty to eat.

This far-famed, all-British Colony idea was sired by an Anglican clergyman, the Rev. Isaac M. Barr. Its dam was the pursuit of wealth; grand-dam, adventure; grandsire, the Britisher's intense longing to own a bit of land.

Though a parson, Barr knew a thing or two about business. The more cynical of the passengers aboard the *Lake Manitoba*, chiefly those from London and the larger cities, had it pretty well reckoned up that if he received commissions—which he was quite entitled to do—from all the interests concerned in supplying the party with things, he would pull down sufficient of "the ready" to enable him to start preaching again.

One chap in the single men's cabin had thrown up a bank manager's berth in one of London's suburbs to try his luck in the Far West. Being clever at figures, he calculated that at only half a sovereign a head from the steamship company, and another from the Canadian Pacific Railway, Barr's perquisites from these sources alone would aggregate two thousand five hundred pounds.

As this rather involved calculation was made, and the result communicated to them after they had enjoyed a magnificent banquet of slices of sour beef, and balls of plum duff whose soggy in'ards had seemingly been shot at with raisins out of a sawn-off

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shotgun at about two hundred yards, the men promptly flew into a riot. This was one of the disturbances already mentioned.

After its inception, Barr's scheme grew like a toadstool in a hothouse. In a very short time he was inundated with applications from people all over Britain for permission to join his party. Precisely why he did not charter another boat; two, three, a fleet, in fact; or why he refrained from squeezing a few more passengers on to the *Lake Manitoba*, is not recorded.

Large sums of money were deposited with Barr in London by the members of the party in payment for such things as C.P.R. land; homestead entry fees; bell tents; shares in the community hospital, and in the great co-operative trading company which was to be founded—for the scheme was slightly tinged with that communistic ideal which has for one of its minor aims the coaxing of a rather coy millennium about three centuries nearer.

The emigrants were to be settled in groups corresponding with the localities from which they hailed in Britain. That is to say: Londoners were to be allotted so many townships all to themselves; the people from Nottingham so many; from Yorkshire so many; and so on. Complete freedom of choice was, of course, permitted. For instance, if any poor trusting soul from Lancashire cared to risk his future among the Londoners, or *vice versa*, there was no rule against it.

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It was freely advertised in the Canadian newspapers that the total wealth of the party in specie alone was considerably in excess of one million dollars. It is more than likely this estimate was much too low. Many men brought to Canada with them anything from one to ten thousand pounds, with easy access to more, too, in lots of cases.

On the thirty-first day of March, nineteen hundred and three, the S.S. *Lake Manitoba* lay in the dock at Liverpool, ready to sail. At last everyone was aboard. Slowly the little liner, with her triple load of human freight, edged away from the quay. Spirits ran high. Cheer followed cheer. Then the band started playing in a haunting, muffled way, "God be with You Till We Meet Again."

The crowd on the quay was suddenly hushed. Women wept. Tears trickled down many a male cheek aboard the boat. Handkerchiefs fluttered, hearts throbbed, and throats filled, as the emigrants stood on the decks, their memories overflowing with the tranquil beauty of dear old England.

But all was well. The weight of the crowds of passengers, and of their profusion of luggage, and dogs, made the tiny boat ride low in the water, but steady. Life belts were noticeably scarce: so were rafts, and lifeboats; but with pocketfuls of money, plenty of armament, and at least three clergymen aboard, the colonists were quite all right should Fate have decided to send the boat to the bottom.

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The party was comprised of lawyers, tradesmen, clerks, two or three farmers, commercial travellers, teachers, remittance men, gentlemen (meaning those who were sufficiently wealthy to live without work), ex-varsity men, and artisans. Males predominated. This magnified the attractiveness of even the plainest girls, a situation they curiously enough quickly took advantage of.

Barr's General Headquarters was a cabin transformed into an office, and situated high up on the boat deck. His Aide-de-Camp was George Flamank. His Chief of Staff was the Rev. George Exton Lloyd, who is now that well-known dynamic Anglican Bishop of Saskatchewan. Numerous lesser stars circled round Barr in flickering constellations.

An immense tract of the most fertile, and practically still untrodden, land in the North Saskatchewan valley had been reserved for the Colony. Barr certainly possessed a gift for having things reserved. Besides a special baggage train, three trains were ear-marked at St. John, N.B., to transport the party to Saskatoon, then an insignificant hamlet containing less than one hundred and fifty people. A fourth train was packed with young men destined for distribution at points in Manitoba. These chaps were without funds, so not being of much interest to anybody, they decided not to go as far as Saskatoon.

The S.S. *Lake Manitoba* arrived at St. John

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on the Saturday preceding Easter Sunday, but no one was permitted to land. She was at once quarantined. Finally, the Canadian port authorities, failing to discover anything amiss with the passengers beyond a trifling, but nevertheless contagious itch—the itch for land—gave her a clean bill of health.

On Easter Sunday the party landed, and in the afternoon boarded their special trains for the Far West. The bells on the engines tolled mournfully, but the colonists, seeing no funerals about, naturally interpreted this doleful music as a sort of send-off.

Droves of people at St. John gazed with half-suppressed amusement at these queerly-caparisoned Englishmen from feudal Europe. The colonists were far too busy storing away cases of sardines, bread, and other eatables for the trip, to reciprocate properly.

After traversing the frozen east, and being completely bored with the melancholy sight of hundreds of miles of dead and dying trees in the region of Lake Superior, they eventually reached Saskatoon, where the weather was brilliantly warm.

With truly commendable foresight, Barr had arranged for his brother Jack to meet the colonists at Saskatoon with stacks of semi-broken horses. Jack did. There are hundreds of people in Canada to-day who can swear to it. With that gifted insight into futurity possessed only by palmists,

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and great leaders, Barr had also arranged with an implement company for them to reserve the output of their factories for a month or so, in order that the party might not be deprived of their right to purchase some brilliantly-coloured machinery. Pretty nearly a trainload of wagons alone was shipped to Saskatoon for the Barr Colonists.

Mysteriously, the majority of the oxen—bulls they were also called—in Western Canada gravitated to Saskatoon. These charming creatures calmly chewed their cud whilst shrewd-eyed philanthropists almost shed tears of sadness at being compelled to part with them for two to three hundred dollars a pair.

Through the kindness of The International Horse Dealers' Society (of North America) Incorporated, a few of the more reputable members of that organization congregated at Saskatoon for the purpose of seeing that the Barr Colonists were not too badly had. At great personal sacrifice, these humanitarians left homes and wives and children to the tender mercies of their better-known neighbours, whilst they themselves set out, some of them over long distances, to obey the orders of their powerful lodge.

Freighters, opportunists of every denomination, curious sight-seers, generous-hearted old timers, advice-tendering well-wishers, all hovered about the great tented town, which, thanks to a few tips

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from the South African veterans, and considerably assisted by a benevolent Providence, the colonists had managed to erect.

The paternal Dominion government sent golden-toothed, silver-tongued orators to Saskatoon to welcome the party and scatter incense of hope about its travel-stained spirit. Flamboyantly, and with dramatic gestures, these professional spell-binders waved the colonists onwards towards the setting sun—to a spot in the wilderness over two hundred miles away.

Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, May, 1928.

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CHAPTER I

A Fight—Choosing Land at Sea

ONE MORNING, when the S.S. *Lake Manitoba* was about in mid-Atlantic, a drizzling rain was being painlessly born out of dank, misty skies. Imperturbably doing her accustomed ten knots, the little liner steadily plunged along through the dripping green seas.

A dense mass of dark-coloured smoke beat down continuously from the single funnel. Trailing for miles astern, it hung over the ship's wake like a shroud. Restless waves, divested by the rain of their usual whitecaps, sloped upwards to lose themselves in the sullen clouds. The cheerless decks, greasy and comfortless, had long since driven nearly everyone into the fetid depths below.

The "orchestra" in the single men's "stateroom" raggedly backed out of their attempt to play the War March of the Priests, and settled down to murder Annie Laurie nice and comfortably. After a time, their nefarious efforts having met with a great deal of success, the performers decided to forbear a little, finishing up with a horrible gasping discord somewhat suggestive of the agony suffered

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by a pair of overblown bagpipes being struck by lightning.

Several young fellows lounged about diligently on bunks and forms. Thanking the musicians for the recital, they began to discuss their future plans desultorily. The previous day, the Rev. Mr. Lloyd had drawn a crowd of convalescent colonists round him on the boat deck to lecture them on pioneering tactics. The reverend gentleman occasionally blew a shrill blast on a whistle he carried, whereupon a few dozen homesteading enthusiasts would come faithfully to heel to be drilled in the latest theories pertaining to prairie agriculture.

"Ranching for this child," said a medium-sized chap with a bored but lofty air. A magnificent knife, containing sufficient tools with which to erect a factory and a couple of rows of cottages, hung from a belt at his waist. Evidently he considered himself an expert in his future profession, for he added in a tone which expressed great familiarity with it: "I intend to breed polo ponies—classy ones, by Jove!"

"Me, too," echoed another fellow, whose velvet-cord riding breeches fairly knocked your eye out. "This corn-growing they talk so much about seems to be more of a workingman's task; don't you think so, Rex, old boy?"

Rex, a big, red-faced young man, the living image of an assured remittance, withdrew his spotty

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features from a mug which a few seconds before had been filled with Bass.

"Beastly bore," he said, "following a bally plough. What!"

The fellow with the multitudinous-bladed knife agreed. "Only a silly ass would think of doing such a thing," he remarked. "Fancy going to Canada and degenerating into a common farm labourer!"

"It's too idiotic for words," observed the fellow in velvet corduroys, as he gazed rather thirstily at the empty mug. "It's indecent—positively preposterous. Is there anything left in the bottle, Rex, dear boy?"

Rex laughed. "Not now," he replied, partly filling the mug again. "Last of the Mohicans, too, so to speak. That beastly steward upstairs, the one with the fishy eyes, refused me any more. He says the blarsted cabin people need the rest of the stuff."

The corduroy-bedecked one, a tallish, good-looking, fair-haired Englishman, smothered his disappointment by exclaiming:

"Oh, I say! come off. I know the steward you mean—the putty-faced rotter! Do they really think all the gentlemen on this moth-eaten barge are travelling first? Why it was only because the gov'nor sent my passage money in to Barr too late that I'm compelled to mix with the scum in this awful hole," and he glanced round the crowded cabin contemptuously.

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"Scum!" suddenly cried a little pug-faced chap who had overheard the remark—Sam, everyone called him. "Scum, did yer say, yer ruddy himi-tashun toff?"

Almost two days had elapsed since Sam had fought his last battle; therefore he was spoiling for another. The fellow in velvet breeches stood up and regarded him amusedly, apparently not the least bit nervous—merely a trifle annoyed at being made the cynosure of so many vulgar eyes. He flushed a deep red.

"If the cap fits, wear it, by all means. In the meantime, kindly oblige me by going to the deuce, there's a good chap." Nevertheless, he watched the little fellow out of the corner of his eye, remembering his reputation for pugnacity.

Snub-nosed Sam at once jumped from off the top bunk where he was sitting, and without further pause launched himself straight at the face of the man in velvet. He reached his mark, but with a glancing blow. Owing to the confined nature of the battlefield, and the excessive exuberance of his attack, he stumbled over his antagonist's feet, which were not at all small, and fell sprawling on the floor.

"Good old Sam!" "At 'im, Sam!" shouted the young fellows from the bunks and forms round about, happy as full-grown men at a dog-fight.

Like a cat, Sam jumped to his feet and made another dash, but this time missed his mark com-

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pletely. A straight clean jab from a long, slim, steely arm caught him plump on the point, or end rather, of his already turned-up nose, and sent him flying among feet and forms.

Universal peace must in reality be a tremendously long way off when two or three hundred young men can be lifted into ecstasy by the prospect of viewing a scrap. Every one who was able to, crowded round and passed encouraging remarks to the combatants. Even the "bandsmen," who had started again to minister to the nausea of the seasick invalids with a particularly discordant prelude, desisted from their charitable efforts to come across to enjoy the fray.

The velvet-breeched one coolly surveyed his handiwork, still on his guard, but obviously not relishing his position.

"Nice one, sir!" "Well played!" "Neat, Gussie, dear!" were a few of the exclamations greeting his success in the first round.

Again Sam rose to attack, though plainly preoccupied with taking astronomical observations.

"Go it, little 'un. Never say yer muvver bred a jibber," some one called to him encouragingly.

More cautiously, as he thought, Sam hit out wildly with his right, managed to disarrange a rather pretty cluster of stars which dangled before his eyes, and, of course, missed his foe again. Then he accepted another little tap on the nose, but there was steel in the blow.

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"Strewth!" he groaned under his breath involuntarily.

"Chuck it, you bally little fool," said the velvet-garbed boxer soothingly. "Shake hands and be friends. You're too full of guts to be called scum."

Rather sheepishly, Sam reluctantly did so.

"Wot's yer blinkin' nyme?" he asked admiringly, in a low voice, mopping at his bleeding nose with an enormous mottled red-and-white handkerchief.

"Never mind my name just now. You may call me Bert if you like."

At this point in the peace conference, two arrogant-looking men pushed their way across the cabin. One of them, in a blatant tone, shouted as he waved a piece of paper in his hand:

"Barr's dishin' out land up in 'is office. We've got ourn. Here y'are—Robert Roberts Robertson—North-west, twenty-four, fifty, twenty-six, W. three—whatever the devil that means—and don't you forget it. With the Leicester lot, we are; aren't we, George?" and he turned to his chum, who also had recently become an estate owner.

"It's right, mates. We've got our land," said the other potentate, as the vessel gave a stomach-turning dip into the trough of a wave, slowly returning to a more or less even keel again with a series of shuddering jerks.

"Land, did someone say?" feebly moaned a

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prostrate form close by, as it wiped its splitting brow with its hand. "My God! if only it's true."

The attention of the idlers was immediately transferred from the reconciliation to more important matters. Another crowd soon gathered about the pair of bloated landowners, eagerly demanding more complete information, which was condescendingly given.

The hunger for land spread with great rapidity. None of the men desired water. They were sick of the filthy, rusty-hued stuff they were forced to drink; and they were tired of the dreary expanse of the salted variety which was spread out all round them in such illimitable quantities.

"Wot abaht a bit of land?" said Sam to Bert, as familiarly as though they had attended school together.

"Brilliant idea, Sam, me lad. Come along," returned Bert: so up to G.H.Q. they went, followed by several more of the men to whom the very word "land" was suggestive of blissful solidity and freedom from that ghastly up and down motion of the steamer.

After waiting half an hour outside the door of Barr's office, the two landseekers went in together. They were both from London, though from widely separated suburbs. No thought of such an ill-assorted companionship as they had apparently struck up had ever entered either of their heads. It was merely the influence of battle which, as so

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often is the case, had been the means of cementing their new friendship. They had taken each other's measure, and were seemingly well satisfied.

The Rev. Isaac M. Barr, dark, squat, heavily-built, preoccupied, was seated at a table. Spread out before him was a large-scale map of the far-away Saskatchewan valley. His A.D.C., George Flammank, mercurial, dark-brown eyes glittering, sat beside him. The Rev. George Exton Lloyd stood on one side—tall, lithe, keen-eyed, the embodiment of energy leashed. A little old chap with greying hair, and scarlet nose and waistcoat, stood handily by, exuding waves of synthetic dignity.

"Well, men, you want some land, I suppose?" said Barr, addressing neither of the pair particularly.

"Yes, if it is convenient to you," replied Bert.

"Not 'arf, sir," said Sam, glancing across at the little man's red nose. Sam stroked his own smarting and swollen proboscis and wondered if the other had acquired his the same way.

Visions of an estate dotted with deer, and duck-ponds, and with redskins peering through the undergrowth—*his* undergrowth—flashed before Bert's mind's eye.

Barr cleared his throat, which appeared a trifle dry.

"Let me see," said he, addressing Bert, "you're from London, aren't you?" Bert nodded affirmatively.

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"—And you're from Birmingham?" Barr added, turning to Sam and obviously guessing.

"No, guv'ner—an' thank Gawd for it," retorted Sam fervently. "I'm from the blinkin' smoke, like 'e is," indicating his companion with a nod.

The little red-nosed man with the flaming waistcoat turned round politely and tried to cough, but he surprised himself, and everybody else, by sneezing seven or eight times instead. Flamank's eyes gleamed. The tall figure of the Rev. Lloyd disappeared through the doorway. Barr smiled mechanically, plainly bored, and said:

"Then you both wish to be with the London party, I presume?"

Sam said they did, and was quite vehement about it. Bert confirmed his answer. At this, Barr turned and spoke to Flamank.

"Put them with the London group. What is there left in fifty-one, twenty-seven?"—meaning township and range. He stood up and leaned over the table, whilst Flamank fished among a pile of papers.

"How would this place suit you?" Barr asked, indicating on the map with his finger an attractive square situated about six hundred miles north-west of Winnipeg.

Bert carefully examined the location. "It looks very nice," he said, after a moment or two.

"It's 'andsome, I calls it," observed Sam, who

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had squeezed his chunky self in between the little red-nosed man and Bert.

As this was the first map Sam had ever inspected, his opinion naturally went a long way with his new pal. The place on the plan to which Barr had referred was a pretty pale-blue section bordered in brown, nicely-shaded, and with a couple of wavy lines—war-paths, probably, thought Bert, who was slightly romantic—running across it obliquely. After a little pause to consider the matter, Bert said:

"It's a delightful place, really. That'll suit us fine, won't it, Sam?"

Sam thought it was "the best bit of land 'e'd ever clapped eyes on." They were both immensely in love with the location.

Barr, through his A.D.C., allotted them adjoining homesteads. Flamank, with pen poised over paper, looked at Bert and said: "Name, please."

"Bertrand Paul Tressider."

"——And yours?"—this to Sam, who was dreamily caressing his turned-up nose.

"Samuel Adolphus Potts—guv'ner."

They handed over their entry fees and, after a record of the location of the land had been duly made, turned and left the cabin.

With new bubbly feelings in their respective young hearts, they descended to the dreary steerage deck. Sam glanced disdainfully at the watery waste surrounding them. It still rained dismally.

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After spitting in the ocean once or twice, he said, meditatively:

"A 'undred an' sixty blinkin' acres of land's a lot, ain't it, Bert?"

"A half-mile square. Why?"

"Oh, nothink. I feel too prahd ter speak."

Bert laughed and strolled away.

"Hey!" Sam called to him. "If you 'appen ter see my man abaht anywhere, tell 'im I want 'im at once, will yer?"

NOTE.—Although sounding far-fetched, scores of Barr Colonists picked their homesteads from a map in Barr's office aboard the S.S. *Lake Manitoba* in mid-Atlantic. A few of them are still living on those same farms to-day.—H. P.

CHAPTER II

Two Skeleton Biographies

BERTRAND PAUL TRESSIDER had been born into a fairly well-to-do, middle-class family. As usual, the unchangeable law of life governing such things permitted him no choice of parents. Presumably, therefore, he would consider himself lucky in not appearing on earth as a Chinese coolie, or, worse still, an African pygmy.

Having been respectably, if not actually luxuriously, ushered into "this best of all possible worlds," he at once became the victim—like everybody else—of environment, heredity and his own devices. He was another unit of evolution; another tiny speck in the pattern of the universe; another spark of energy let loose in a scheme, apparently eternal, for the furtherance of some vast, unfathomable design.

Except for two or three sisters, who appeared on the scene years later, he was an only child. At birth he had been endowed with a very large head. For this reason, his parents watched him closely, hopeful that he might turn out to be a prime minister, although at the same time fearful lest he develop into an imbecile. One never can tell with big heads. Only expert phrenologists know for certain. A bump or two either way, and . . .

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But there was no occasion to worry. Pretty soon little Bertrand began to make it quite plain that he wanted his own way in everything. Also he commenced to exhibit a keen desire to smash things up—toys, and pots and things; all to the accompaniment of violent outbursts of temper. It was a happy day for the fond parents when they definitely accepted this infallible proof of their darling boy's saneness.

As time went on, Bertrand's over-sized cranium, instead of being reckoned a possible symptom of idiocy, became the subject of joyful speculation.

"Mark my words," said Tressider, senior, one evening, when he and his wife were admiring the way the young prodigy was trying to throttle a kitten; "he'll be a great lawyer some day."

Bertrand's mother thought not. She was descended from a family which in the last hundred years had shot forth stray branches delicately blossomed with Church of England clergymen. She said she quite thought her son was cut out for a bishop.

Tressider, senior, of lineage far less esthetic, noting young Bertrand's display of acquisitive gifts, countered with schemes for the boy's future more in keeping with the world's idea of success.

"No, my dear," he had said, "he'll never be a bishop. He's much too wise for that. Look how he keeps his chubby hand round the throat of that kitten where it can't possibly get at him.

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That's extremely clever. No, Ethel, dearest, we'll give him a good education, and I shall be altogether mistaken if he doesn't turn out to be a highly-successful man, and become rich, and the envy of all his friends."

"I did so hope," responded Mrs. Tressider gently, "that he would follow in his Uncle Theobald's footsteps. Such a calm, peaceful nature he had; so good; so deeply spiritual; so true to his own church, the only church; not a bit like these modern ministers who go about converting and upsetting people, and hobnobbing with other sects; so——"

"For God's sake, don't talk so much, Ethel," interposed Tressider, senior, irritably, "or else say something more to the point. I thought we were discussing the boy's future. It isn't to be imagined for one moment that his talents should be wasted like that. Look at him! Just look at him now! Take particular notice of the way he recognizes me as his father. Did you ever see such intelligence written on a human face? And that head of his—neither too small, nor yet too big; in fact, just right. And we used to be nervous about it. Tut! Tut! No, my dear, if that boy doesn't turn out to be either a Lord Chancellor, or a Viceroy of India, I'll eat my best silk hat, hang me if I won't. Why only the other morning, Tom Bett—and you know very well he never exaggerates—told me when he was signing me up for another thousand-pound

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insurance policy, 'Tressider, old fellow,' he says, 'that boy of yours is an absolute marvel, he is, indeed. It's my firm opinion he's smart enough to be a law——'"

"Why, John, dear, Mr. Bett has never even seen Ber——"

"There you go again, always interrupting me. Let me tell you once for all that I've finally decided Bertrand shall be a lawyer. He's almost three years old now—or is it two?—no matter, he ——"

"Thirteen months, and three days ——"

"No matter, I say. It's quite time we did something about his future. Life is short—too short. Look at me—fifty gone, and only a civil service clerk. True, it's the higher civil service; and we're well off, I know; but what have I really accomplished? Nothing—absolutely nothing. Let it be a lesson to us. Let us choose Bertrand's profession for him, and carry the idea out, not deviating one hair's-breadth from our intention. Let—— There, just what I expected! That wretched cat isn't to be trusted. Didn't I tell you not to allow him to play with the thing?—Good Lord, can't you stop him squalling? I never heard such a row in all my life. Do something with him for goodness' sake. Feed him. Shove that ring in his mouth. Something's sticking into him somewhere. Great Scott! what a vile temper. Shall I tell Harriet to come up and see to him, dear? I'm going to the club, and I can easily call to her on my way out.

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She's bound to be in the kitchen with one of her favourite flames, I suppose. I shan't be late, dearest. Don't bother sitting up for me."

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So, after deciding, with such admirable judgment, upon making a lawyer of Bertrand, his parents saw to it that he was well educated. First he was sent to a select private school which was conducted by the Misses Arbuthnot—a couple of elderly spinsters who were distinguished by being distantly related to a major in the Indian army. At this scholastic temple he was taught to consider it a frightful vulgarity to laugh in the street when he saw the butcher's boy set his basket down so as better to chase a cat, whilst a dog slipped off with the tripe and the mutton chops.

Next he went to a big grammar school where the masters were able to teach him nearly as much as his companions did; finally he was pitchforked into the office of a large and successful firm of lawyers at Sheffield as an articled clerk.

Neither Foggum on Conveyancing, Grabbit on the Law of Entail, Splitup on Divorce, nor any legal luminary on the whole bag of tricks of jurisprudence, managed very much to amuse Bertrand. Eventually he succeeded in making a frightful hash of his final examination, which event occurred just about the time Barr invented his all-British Colony scheme in London. Bert promptly seized

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the legal bit in his teeth, ran off as though a dozen County Court judges were exploding behind him, made Barr's acquaintance over a couple of whiskies-and-soda, then calmly waited for the sailing of the *Lake Manitoba*.

Bert had never really forgotten the Leatherstocking tales of Fenimore Cooper; nor yet Mayne Reid's Scalp Hunters; nor all the other Wild West stories among which he had contrived ingeniously to sandwich his legal studies. Some irresistible force within himself urged him towards the great open spaces. The romance of the endless prairies beckoned to him seductively with its adventurous imaginings. And, besides, he couldn't help himself. He was in the grip of heredity. Several of his progenitors had been wanderers. One of them had been hanged—so his father frequently boasted—by the Spaniards as a heretic, at Santa Cruz, because he refused to kiss a cross made from blood-stained Inca gold.

When his father heard of the move, he argued against it—a trifle weakly though. He himself had many times nursed secret longings for a career filled with yardarms, pieces of eight, tomahawks and shark-infested lagoons. Bert was obdurate. With horrible recklessness, he sacrificed his chances of the Woolsack, greatly to his father's rather insipidly-expressed disappointment. However, when the time for the sailing of Barr's pioneering crusaders drew near, the old gentleman paid his



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passage, financed him to the tune of five hundred pounds, and also provided him with an exceedingly generous kit.

Samuel Adolphus Potts' life history had been much less complicated. That little man's wits had been tempered in the environment of a fairly prosperous cab driver's home; rough-ground in a huge jam factory, among the sophisticated emery wheels of crowds of both sexes; finally burnished and sharpened as an extra barman in a not-very-high-class but well-patronized London public house.

Sam's capital consisted of twenty-odd pounds, clear of travelling expenses—plus an invincible common-sense.

CHAPTER III

Saskatoon—Acquiring Transport

IN THE evening of April 17, 1903, at precisely twenty minutes before seven o'clock, the third of the C.P.R. special passenger trains carrying Barr Colonists steamed gingerly across the old wooden bridge spanning the South Saskatchewan River and clattered into Saskatoon.

The weather was gorgeous. The middle of April had only just slid by, yet the sun shone dazzlingly out of an azure sky. Far-distant objects etched themselves in the magic air with marvellous visibility. Not one single thing in Nature marred the colonists' arrival.

From a tumbled heap of unguarded bell tents, each of which was tucked, pegs and all, into a bag, the settlers helped themselves freely. Long before several hundred of these conical canvas shelters were coaxed—with many imprecations, and much laughter—to stand erect, the sun had disappeared below the edge of the world, leaving behind it a glorious topaz-flaked sky, which slowly turned to purple before melting into mysterious night.

That morning, the hamlet had jumped out of bed with a population of a trifle over a hundred to its credit—or, allowing for a few of the more

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important citizens being counted twice, say a level one hundred. At night, it retired to rest boasting two thousand. Saskatoon's eclipse was over.

The camp sprang into vivid life early the next morning. There was much to be done. The faces of the natives whom the colonists came in contact with were all burned a deep nut brown, the result of the reflection of the sun's heat off late winter snows. "Everybody's been to the seaside," Bert decided to himself. This tanned appearance, coupled with the narrowing of their eyes, which was caused by squinting through the glare, imparted a by no means unsightly aboriginal aspect to the natives.

The "Barr-lambs" were soon approached by those of the shrewd-looking traders who had horses, or oxen, or something or other to sell. Everything in the district—even portions of the "town" itself—was for sale. No one seemed to mix sentiment with ownership. A practical sort of philosophy, that!—especially when one remembers that one is on earth for only sixty or seventy years.

Most of the males of the Barr party plunged into orgies of buying. It is quite safe to state that never in the history of colonization in Western Canada has such a multitude of wealthy and free-handed spenders been gathered in one place.

It was Saskatoon's day out. Even Fate itself took sides, neglecting its duties of determining the

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"Heads or tails?" of existence elsewhere on earth, in order to patronize the little hamlet.

Prodigious efforts were made to satisfy the many needs of the colonists. From a baker's shop but slightly larger than a fair-sized room, a man worked day and night in an endeavour to keep the camp supplied with bread. It was an impossible task. So flapjacks, pancakes and bannock bread were concocted.

Weird experiences of the widest variety crowded thick and fast about the ingenuous Englishmen. One young fellow, a pale, thin-cheeked grocer's assistant from somewhere in Sussex, bought a stallion, three sections of drag harrows, and a pair of spurs within twenty-four hours of reaching Saskatoon. The vendor of the horse was an Ontario man. He said the animal's official name was "Napoleon Bonyparte," and that it possessed (which is more than the Emperor himself did) a pedigree longer than from Guelph to Owen Sound.

After about a week, the grocer's assistant re-christened his stallion "Beelzebub," and then traded it off to a man at the livery stable for a second-hand stock-saddle. So what with the harrows, and the cowboy saddle, and the spurs, not mentioning the experience he was buying, he was doing pretty well, particularly as his mind, in its more rational moments, leaned strongly to mixed farming. It was severe pressure from his neighbours in camp, really, which induced him to sever his connection with

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"Beelzebub." Being springtime, the animal used to plunge about and squeal a lot, keeping tired people awake at night.

Teams of vicious-looking mustangs, hitched to brand-new wagons, careered up and down the main street of the tiny hamlet like runaway fire engines. The more speedy of them, not recognizing the uses of reverse, wheeled in great circles about the adjacent prairie. Others, not so numerous, but sufficiently so to prevent monotony, probably sensing a two-hundred-mile journey into the vast unknown, gave full bent to their natural proclivities for doing their heaviest pulling in reverse. These were called baulkers, which, translated into English stable talk, means jibbers. A few teams were determined neither to back up nor advance, but simply stood stock-still, at the same time wearing a stupid but comic air of the most abject self-pity.

Philosophical oxen of biblical aspect, contrasting vividly with their vendors' appearance, waddled along in yokes, or in meagre harness, or lay down in various attitudes of peaceful somnolence, apparently dreaming of a bovine heaven carpeted with luscious green grass.

A whole trainload of machinery was being unloaded. The colonists queued up, and in some instances actually fought, for the wagons, which were in huge demand. Spot cash was paid for everything—a proceeding which almost paralyzed the natives at first, but, true to their characteristic

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adaptability, they quickly grew accustomed to the miracle.

"Wot are we goin' to get to our land wiv?" queried Sam, the third or fourth evening after they reached Saskatoon—"hoxen or 'orses?"

They were talking things over in Bert's bell tent, which was one of the hundreds flecking the yellow prairie west of the then Canadian Pacific Railway line—the Regina-Prince Albert branch.

Bert adopted an air of supreme wisdom, ridiculously unnatural in one so young and green.

"I rather fancy horses, myself," he replied; "although they do say those bally bullocks can get along without anything to eat."

Sam sniffed. "I'm fer the gee-gees. Know a bit abaht 'em an' all. My ole man used ter drive a blinkin' cab. 'E once drove the Juke of——"

"Damn the Duke! What's that to do with it? The question is—can you hold your end up when it comes down to business relations with these horse dealer chaps?"

"'Old my end up in an 'orse deal! Wot d'yer tyke me for—a ruddy vetinary surgeon?"

"Perhaps we'd better commission one of the government men," observed Bert. "I hear they are familiar with horse-flesh, and, being in the colonial civil service, they are sure to be as straight as a gun-barrel."

The discussion was shelved for the time being, but the next day they took pot-luck at a team.

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Saskatoon was well awake by the time they plunged head-first into the turbulent sea of horse-trading.

"Ow old is them 'orses?" says Sam to a tall, dark man, eyeing a grey and a buckskin with wise un wisdom. The team was tied to the side of a second-hand wagon, and was dressed in a rather ornate set of harness plentifully bespattered with unpolished brass knobs and things.

The vendor wore a tranquil appearance almost approaching benevolence, as though he might have a New Testament tucked away in his pocket somewhere. Not being particularly good at arithmetic, Sam's question had completely stumped him. However, he spat slowly a couple of times, to give himself a chance to reckon up, and then said:

"Eight and nine."

Only a confirmed cynic would have doubted him, he was so obviously sincere.

Presently Bert says: "How much?"

The tall, dark man's face was like a mask, but an acute observer might have noticed that his conscience wiggled a bit at Bert's abrupt question. He soon put that in its place, however.

"Five hundred for the outfit," he said, as coolly as though it were the middle of winter. Then Sam and Bert, looking frightfully sagacious, sidled away for a private consultation.

"Wot abaht it?" whispered Sam. "Ain't that grey 'orse got a wickid eye? The yellor 'un looks a faithful sort of animal, though."

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Right in the middle of some profound thinking by Bert, whose father's hard-earned money was soon to be involved, a short, thick-set man, dressed in a pair of faded blue overalls and a week's growth of reddish whiskers, slouched up and spoke to them.

"You boys wantin' a team?"

"We are, my son," returned democratic Sam, cheerily. Bert, not having been introduced, was naturally annoyed at the rude intrusion. With true "Arbuthnot" training, he drew back a little, and kept silent. But his English aloofness rolled off the fellow's gall as easily as mercury off a sheet of glass.

"That pair there," said the thick-set man, pointing at the grey and buckskin, "is the best team in North America. I drove 'em all day yesterday, so I oughta know. Draw! Say, boys, you just oughta see that there grey get down and heave."

Sam hid his suspicion behind a vacuous grin, his big, rather ugly, mouth opening like a cheap purse.

"Wot are you gettin' aht of this?" he asked.

"Not a dam' nickel. I'm only trying to do you boys a good turn"—then, approaching the team, the stranger exclaimed—"Ho, there, George!" and he caught hold of the buckskin's tail, twisted it sharply aside, then in a charmingly familiar manner smacked the inside of the animal's left thigh several times.

The horse, George, lifted his foot dangerously. A stored-up kick or two lurked somewhere about;

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but the supreme self-confidence, and personal magnetism, of the man in reddish whiskers completely awed him. Then he put his foot down again as meekly as a half-dead cab horse might have done.

Sam surveyed the playful stranger's overalls, then his discoloured sweater, then his whiskery chin.

"So you are one of them there good samaringtons wot goes abaht the purple world doin' kind hactions, are yer?"

The stranger appeared somewhat surprised at the scepticism so plainly stamped on Sam's ugly face.

"If you boys don't believe me," he protested, "don't, that's all. And I ain't no good samarington, either. That's a new one on me. I'm a liveryman. I work at that barn over there," and he waved his hand towards a mass of sway-backed, neoteric architecture of noble dimensions which graced one of Saskatoon's main thoroughfares. Evidently deeply grieved at being misunderstood, he made himself look as much as possible like a martyr being condemned to the stake, and then walked off in the direction of the livery-stable.

"That man's an 'ostler, Bert," remarked Sam, "but 'e's tellin' the trufe. The silly fool's as innercent as us. Why 'e don't even know wot a good samarington is!"

"Obnoxious fellow," muttered Bert, "poking his nose into a gentlemanly transaction, like that."

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"Never mind 'im," returned Sam. "Let's buy the 'orses. They seem 'armless. An' just look at the neck of that grey 'un!"

The tall, dark owner of the team was patiently waiting. Not a muscle of his face moved. Not the slightest hint did he give as to whether he were a lying horse dealer, or a recently converted cavalryman.

Bert, assuming an air of perspicacity positively weird in its gravity, went over and felt of the horses' legs—the front ones, luckily. After conducting a very minute search for blemishes, and, finding no indications of spavins or poll evil on their kneecaps, he bought and paid for them.

Coldly the owner accepted the cash, rolled it up and shoved it into his pocket, spat once with great satisfaction, never said Thank you, Go to blazes, nor uttered a single one of the many similar pleasantries which are reputed to smooth the path of trade, and then calmly sauntered away towards the livery-barn.

The ghost of a smile drifted fleetingly across his inscrutable features as he peeled a ten-dollar bill from the outside of a thick roll and handed it to the reddish-whiskered tactician. That model of truth and virtue was wasting some of his valuable time filling a very large wheelbarrow with exceedingly small forkfuls of horse dung in the main gangway of the overcrowded livery-barn.

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"That's two hundred and a quarter you cleaned up on that deal—ch?" he grinned, as he folded the ten-spot about eight times and thrust it into an empty tobacco sack. "Ha-ha-ha!" he gurgled. "Pretty good! Pretty good! How would it be if we went along to the Queen's and had one on the green Englishmen?"

This rather clever suggestion appeared to meet with the tall, dark stoic's silent but sincere approval, for immediately they both walked out of the barn as though to carry it into effect.

"What's that silly ass intend to do about his wagon and harness, I wonder?" demanded Bert of his little partner, a few minutes after the vendor's departure. "Surely he doesn't expect us to take care of them for him. Run across and ask him what we're to do with them, Sam!"

Rightly or wrongly, Sam had all his life been trained to regard the striving after excessive purism in business as an infallible sign of approaching idiocy.

"Say nothink wotever abaht 'em. If 'e don't worry arter 'em 'isself, why should we? Come on, let's slip orf before 'e begins ter think abaht remem-berin' 'e's forgot 'em."

Bert almost blushed at the dishonourable proposal. But he was much too sensitively constructed to appear ultra-virtuous, so he silently acquiesced.

With a little instruction, and less assistance,

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from two or three interested onlookers, they hitched the horses to the wagon and drove off to purchase a schooner-top. Something must have propitiated Fate. The horses went along all right. Though being almost old enough to vote, they were perfectly honest.

CHAPTER IV

Saskatoon—Buying Machinery

BERT'S parents had always been secretly proud of their son as a correspondent. Faithfully he wrote to them from M—— Grammar School once or twice each year. But, later on, whilst articled to an immensely wealthy firm of lawyers at Sheffield, he had communicated with his father much more frequently.

Always his requests were granted. Money requests they were chiefly—for Sir Felix Hamingway, great nonconformist, lawyer, magistrate, knight, Chairman of Directors of Tipsey's Pale Ales, Limited, generous giver to both Home and Foreign Missions, and Bert's employer, had made it a fixed rule never to pay his first-year articled clerks more than fifteen shillings and sixpence weekly. His mental excuse for being so profligate in the matter of salaries was that his minister's ebony-skinned, woolly-headed protégés residing along the banks of the Zambezi were such a drain on his limited purse.

Therefore, being so accustomed to letter writing, it was second nature for Bert to send home a message from Saskatoon. In the evening of the exciting day distinguished by the purchase of a team, he

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scribbled a missive to his mother, by candle-light. Its contents went something like this:

"I trust you and dad and the girls are in the pink. To-day I have bought a pair of horses, a grey and a sort of blonde, and have named them Tempest and Kruger. Rather jolly names, don't you think?

"From the address mentioned above, you will see that I am writing this from Saskatoon. It is a bare spot, and was not of much importance before we Barr Colonists came. It is merely a score or so of glorified packing-cases sitting bleakly on the prairie beneath a great blue arch of sky, and ringed about with a distant horizon clear-cut as the edge of a silhouette. The South Saskatchewan River, which just now is gorged with, and vomiting, great blocks of ice, runs close by. The town (as they call it here) is threaded on the railway line which connects Regina with Prince Albert, pretty much as a small, dirty-coloured bead is strung on a bit of wire.

"The Canadians, mother, seem to have an odd way of disfiguring a patch of their otherwise decent country. In Yorkshire, when the inhabitants wish to ruin some lovely landscape, they sink a coal-pit, and, if that fails, build a blast furnace. In London, as you well know, they rely more on slums for miasmal effects. Out here, apparently, they nail a few boards together, call it a town, and the ghastly work is done.

"And this fiercely searching Canadian sunlight

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shows everything up so. Why, there was actually a dead dog stretched out on a vacant piece of ground beside one of the shops where I purchased some stuff to-day. Probably a dead dog is an object of veneration in these parts, but I hardly think so, because on this particular waste patch there was a big signboard planted, bearing the words—THIS LOT FOR SALE.

“If there is such a place as purgatory, mother—and I know you deny it—Barr is galloping there fast. He has stepped rather heavily on the crooked end of this scheme of his, and the other end has tipped up and dealt him an awful whack in the face.

“His plans are boomeranging dangerously. The party is out here, and that’s about all one can say. Right at this moment, in the next tent to my own, a matter of ten yards away perhaps, there are two men—and two wives, presumably—screaming at one another with rage over what they persist in calling, in their queer dialect, ‘Barr’s perfidery.’ It is excruciatingly funny.

“As for me, I’m tolerably well pleased with everything so far. I’ve adopted a partner. Sam Potts is his name—an awfully decent little chap, and smart as a whip. In his own vulgar way he is a gentleman, though not the least bit educated. And yet he seems to know a great deal. He is energetic, uglier than some sins, very irreligious, for he swears terribly, but tremendously amusing. You’ll hear more about him from me, I dare say.

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"The Barr Colony community hospital is slowly taking shape. It is a bell tent. A big, handsome doctor with splendid eyes, but with a Jewish cast of face, is in charge. I did wonder for a minute whether it mightn't be worth my while to contract some sort of mild, lingering illness, so that I might become a hospital patient, and enjoy a bit of comfort, and a square meal or two; but, after noticing a fearful-looking bucksaw, and an axe, leaning up against the tent, and also happening to catch a side-view of a nurse's face, I have changed my mind, and am now, I'm very pleased to say, really feeling magnificently fit.

"We are starting out on our two-hundred-mile trek to-morrow morning, perhaps—D.V., as you sometimes say.

"Mother, dear! What do you think! I HAVE GOT MY LAND; a charming place—at least I think so. Please tell dad, tactfully, that I expect to run short of money soon.

"And now for bed. More next time. Your affectionate son, Bertie."

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Next morning, over coffee and bacon, cooked by Sam on a small rectangular tin stove, the two young men discussed their arrangements for the immediate future.

Between a mouthful of solids, and a big gulp of steaming coffee, Sam said:

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"We've got to 'ave 'ay an' oats fer them 'orses on this trek of oun."

"Not to mention tucker for ourselves," added Bert thoughtfully, as he veneered a chunk of bread with about a quarter of a pound of butter; "besides, something to work the land with, I suppose. Ranching for me, though."

"Rarnchin'—'ell!" scoffed Sam. "You wait till yer knows somethink abaht 'orses, first. Why, I don't suppose yer knows 'ow many young 'uns an 'orse 'as at a litter, do yer?"

"Why are you always so foolishly analytical? What the dickens does it matter how many they have at a litter! The more the merrier, I say. With polo ponies at two hundred pounds a head; and—"

"Ever kep' rabbits?"

"No."

"White mouses?"

"No."

"Pidgins?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"Well, yer don't know nothink. Yore edgucation's a fraud. Wot's the good of Lating, an' law, an' matthewmaticks, an' all that sort of stuff nah? Like I told my ole man when 'e was goin' to 'ave me edgucated: 'No charnce, guv'ner,' I says; 'I don't want ter be no swell, an' ride abaht in carriages over the skelingtons of the bloomin' poor. No,' I says, 'I——'"

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"You infernal blithering idiot! Even though you can't talk like a gentleman, do for heaven's sake try to reason like one. Give me a cigarette."

Sam threw a packet of Gold Flakes across to his partner, afterwards taking and lighting one himself.

"Fed the 'orses this mornin'?" he asked.

"No."

"Watered 'em?"

"No."

"Bin ter see if they've 'opped it?"

"No."

"Where did yer get this rarnchin' idea from?"

"It told you all about it in the government pamphlet Barr sent to me."

"An' it told yer abaht a lot more rot. But did it say anythink abaht that lovely cabing on the boat?—or abaht them 'undreds of seasick dawgs 'owling up on deck?—till that chap from Belfarst chucked all but thirty of 'em hoverboard one dark night. Did it say anythink abaht us 'avin' ter scrap fer waggins? No. An' wot abaht that land of oun? 'Ow d'we know some sneak ain't bin an' gorne an' pinched it? Do try ter reason like a——"

Sam's harangue was abruptly interrupted. Half a loaf of bread caught him with great precision on the side of the head, the valuable missile afterwards ricochetting into the side of the tent.

After a pause filled with broad grins, he went on: "You fancy yerself wiv a pen, don't yer? I saw yer

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writin' ter yer gel larst night. Write dahn a list of the things we want, an' let's go an' get 'em, an' then slope orf ter see our land."

"Good idea," said Bert, who at once pulled a pencil from his pocket, and on the back of a crumpled envelope commenced to write down a list of the articles they each thought might be useful.

"Cigarettes," Bert said first, jotting the item down.

"Plagh an' 'arrows," said Sam.

"Yes; and tinned milk, by Jove!"

"Oats, an' 'ay—an' a chain, an' a rope."

"Postage stamps."

"A blinkin' 'atchit; an' some matches, an' a buckit."

"Brown boot polish," said Bert, gradually becoming inspired.

"A shovel—an' wot abaht a garding rake?"

"Bally rot! Be sensible. Tooth powder, and—er—a couple of bottles of Scotch for medicinal purposes—or perhaps we'd better make it three."

"'Ear, 'ear!" cried Sam warmly, standing up and stretching himself; "but come on, that's enough, or else we's'll 'ave to 'ire one of them black-lookin' savages wiv pigtails 'angin dahn their backs to 'elp us ter cart it up to our land."

Before six o'clock that morning, whilst Bert had in his dreams been riding after bands of spotted stallions over miles of rolling prairie, Sam had risen,

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washed himself, and attended to their team, which was tied to the wagon just outside the tent.

Bert rinsed his hands and face in the enamelled basin which rested on three crossed sticks stuck in the ground. Considering the bowl contained the day before yesterday's soap-scummed water, he was able to make himself passably clean. He brushed his velvet cords; smoothed his yellow hair before a miniature mirror which dangled from the tent-pole, and emerged into the open bare-headed.

Sam, disdaining contact with water twice in one morning, had again slipped out to see if the horses were tied securely. He was continually haunted by the fear of their escape on to the fenceless wastes which rolled away to the far-off horizon, and to unknown distances beyond. The grey and buckskin had nosed through the remains of a slight feed of hay, and were industriously nibbling at the wisps of withered grass beneath.

Several hundred tents, most of which resembled their own, were scattered about the plain in haphazard profusion. A few new marquees reared themselves above humbler fellows, their size, and newness, and milk-white colour faintly suggesting ostentation.

Amateurish campfires filled the sparkling air with whiffs of pleasant-smelling wood smoke. A dozen or so of dogs, brought all the way from England, and wearing brass-mounted collars made of leather

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which would still be in its prime when the harness with which the colonists were decking their teams would be thrown away, barked and whined after the few lean but good-natured native canines.

Women, some enchantingly neat, others sloppily untidy, moved about and in and out of the tents over unfamiliar tasks. Some of the ladies resented the free and easy mixing of castes. These blue-blooded females tried to prevent their own sweet offspring from fraternizing with the far less charming kids of other people. But democratic childhood would have none of it, and went yelling and scampering about the camp, disturbing the everlasting siestas of phlegmatic oxen, and running frightful risks with the heels and even more treacherous fore feet of hypocritical bronchos.

Men, who were blissfully ignorant of the mysteries of Canadian harness, taught others, who were more so, how to do things. Every little while a knowing native would win for himself some sweet-tasting admiration by initiating a crowd of wondering colonists in the art of inserting an iron bit between the tight-clenched teeth of a stupid horse with its head about three miles up in the air.

Barr's G.H.Q. marquee was a seething whirl of disorganized organization. The troubles and complaints of dissatisfied and grumbling colonists came sliding and tumbling and breaking over the leader's harassed head in avalanches of inquiries, and cascades of protest.

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Flamank could do no other than bob about on the storm-tossed sea of trouble like a light cork. At every twist and turn he was shot at with unanswerable queries. Both going and coming he was riddled with broadsides of acrimonious remarks. Though let down continually by his chief; constitutionally excitable; with all the clerical work connected with a small army of mutinous colonists passing through his hands, and head; a perpetual target for the darts of ignorance, and innocence; yet, in spite of all, he survived eventually to become the Colony's first postmaster.

The Rev. George Exton Lloyd, veteran of the Riel Rebellion, moved about with hands tied, inwardly boiling with suppressed indignation, but absolutely impotent without the mantle of authority. Why a man of his experience, and punch, and unbounded energy didn't throw up, or blow up, or attempt to wring Barr's neck, is incomprehensible.

The Rev. Isaac M. Barr himself, founder and head of the scheme, beginning early to lose his grip, copied many a worse, and better, man, before and since, by seeking solace in whiskey. Booze was procurable at Saskatoon. But the mellowest of whiskies, not even excepting those which are renowned for their subtle, inspirational qualities, will inevitably fail when relied upon to do a job like the one Barr had tackled. Barr should have known that whiskey—like fire, and some leaders

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of enterprises—makes a very fine servant, but a poor master.

The non-abstaining members of the party—and there were at the very least two or three—showered deserving praise on the Canadian system of dispensing drinks, a method which allowed them to help themselves from bottles—some with suspiciously dirty labels—of Scotch, whilst leaning on a bar psychologically contrived to be of exactly the correct height.

The price of the drinks was another matter, though. The Englishmen from Yorkshire and other northern counties gave themselves some horrible shocks by translating cents into pence—like some of them are doing twenty-five years afterwards. But, generally speaking, the quality and quantity of the liquid refreshment induced the most comment, and heartburning.

As Sam and Bert threaded their way through the litter of the camp and its environs, so suggestive of a busy horse-fair, they unconsciously gulped into their lungs large draughts of winy spring air. From a cloudless, turquoise sky, a glittering sun shed waves of summer-like warmth. Cooling breezes flowed gently through the heated camp.

As far as eye could see, small glistening snow-banks, relics of winter's blizzards, flecked the tawny plains in silvery clusters. From beneath snowy mounds, the sudden heat sent tiny streams of

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water trickling and biting their way over the thawed-out surface of the soil. Following the easiest channels, these transient brooks went gurgling on, joined with others, mixed, laughed, swelled, grew most important as they bubbled along, then all at once—like the colonists themselves did later on—rushed blindly into an ambushed slough.

Before crossing the railway line to enter the village, Sam and Bert lingered a while to hear the Rev. Isaac M. Barr addressing—and being addressed by—a large group of acrid-tempered colonists.

" . . . Just listen to me, men," he was saying earnestly; "the worst is now almost over. Have faith! Follow your leaders into the land of promise, where independence is waiting for those who will work. My transportation company is *not* dead, as some mischief-makers would have you believe . . ."

The reverend gentleman was standing on somebody's big black cabin-trunk. He looked worried. His clerical spruceness was fraying at the edges a bit. Pausing nervously to open a folded sheet of paper—a telegram from St. John appertaining to the trifling matter of five hundred tons of missing luggage—he took advantage of the break in his speech to moisten his lips with his tongue. They were dry, like ashes.

Beating up against the pleasant breeze, fragments of a song being sung uproariously, struck his

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tired ears in variable gusts of sound, now faint, now loud. With perfectly diabolical clearness, the ribald voices wafted verse after verse across to the crowd.

“Barr, Barr, wily old Barr,
He'll do you as much as he can;”

“Men!” shouted the dispirited leader in a desperate attempt to smother the song's ugly significance. “Be British——”

With a crowd's usual cruelty, a few of the bravest cowards jeered and mocked. Meanwhile, relentlessly, like the toppling crest of a wave breaking on the beach, the verse went on—

“You bet he will collar,
Your very last dollar,
In the valley of the Sas-katch-e-wan.”

The crowd burst into loud laughter. Barr, with a mechanical sort of effort, tried bravely to compel his own strained features to smile, but he failed miserably.

In a bell tent, about a hundred yards off, half a dozen throaty prodigies were seated comfortably on the ground with a nearly-emptied bottle of Saskatoon's choicest wassail nice and handy. In ironical tones, they ripped out the chorus of the song, totally unaware of the devastating effect it was having on Barr's meeting.

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“Farm, farm, do let us farm,
We’re sure that the most of us can;
We’ll plough and we’ll sow,
And we’ll reap and we’ll mow,
In the valley of the Sas-katch-e-wan.”

“The Nautch Girl” was the particular musical comedy honoured with the supplying of the air in which this marvellously poetical masterpiece was rendered. The author of the “poem” had, between spasms of biliousness aboard the *Lake Manitoba*, composed eighteen stanzas of it, before crawling away to die.

Like most early Barr Colony experiences, this particular incident at Saskatoon was pathetic, yet at the same time comic. With a dreary gesture of hopelessness, Barr stepped down from the trunk and hurried within his tent. Contemptuously, the crowd gradually dispersed.

Half pityingly, Sam murmured—“Gawd!” He bore Barr no special malice. Indeed, if anything, he was very grateful to the reverend leader for being the means of his separating himself from his sordid environment in London.

“I feel a bit sorry for the old boy,” was Bert’s only comment, as the pair headed towards the village.

Stepping into Saskatoon’s main street, a wide, unkempt, dirt-metalled thoroughfare, irregularly bordered on one side with unpainted wooden struc-

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tures, and running alongside the railway station, Bert and Sam set about purchasing their goods.

The few business men were doing a roaring trade. To most of the colonists, prices mattered little—even though these were occasionally inflated. Both English and Canadian money was abundant. A composite odour of cheese, boots, shirts, soap, men and mice permeated all the stores, branding them with a smell as characteristic as that possessed by the interior of an Indian's teepee.

Suddenly descending upon a hamlet containing only one hundred people, this horde of immigrant buyers, with the almost as numerous crowd of traders and hangers-on, all spending their proportion of wealth with true prairie prodigality, created a sort of premature heaven for Saskatoon's storekeepers.

Groups of idlers lounged about everywhere—in the stores, near the livery-barn, and round the hotel. A few tired creatures leaned listlessly against the strongest of the buildings. Skirting these, Sam and Bert came to a place where farm implements were exposed for sale.

"We's'll want somethink ter plagh the garding wiv," said Sam, stopping to admire the gaudily-painted machines which were spread about on some waste ground, and on the board sidewalk, overflowing into the sandy roadway.

"Of course," observed Bert. "This is a plough, I presume," and he flicked a speck of dirt off the iron seat of a rather flashy disk harrow.

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Sam said nothing. He had never been on a farm, nor had he even seen one at close quarters. The prattle of agriculture was as Sanskrit to him; so, like a sensible man, he left the subject entirely to Bert, who knew almost as much.

"That ain't a plough," laughed a great, ponderous man who wheezed over towards them; "that there's a disk. What d'you boys want?"

The speaker was a very large, swarthy-faced man with baggy eyes, cheeks and trousers. He wore one gold-coloured ring, two lodge symbols, three chins, four tobacco-stained gold teeth, and a big, smooth smile. Glancing at him with mild curiosity, Bert said:

"We want something to cultivate our land with—a plough is the best instrument, I suppose,"—concluding apologetically—"we aren't going in for corn-growing, though; are we, Sam?" Bert looked towards his little companion for affirmation, but Sam was busily occupying himself with salvaging about an inch and a half of badly-mutilated cigarette from his right-hand waistcoat-pocket, and pretended not to hear.

The fleshy Goliath slipped a cigar across to the opposite corner of his mouth, which then tightened conveniently in a smile.

"What are you going in for, then?" he asked, amusedly.

"Ranching."

"Ranching what?"

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"Horses—polo ponies."

Sam edged away and lighted his cigarette. He tried to borrow a match from a passer-by, who must have been of Scottish descent, for, although being in a desperate hurry to be gone, he preferred wasting five minutes over giving the little cockney a light from the bowl of his pipe.

The big man was smiling broadly at Bert. It would have been rude to laugh outright; besides, that would have necessitated the removal from his mouth of the freshly-lighted cigar. This enormous man had sold machinery for almost twenty years; then had collected for it, finally becoming an inspector. But he wasn't cold-hearted. He had too much fat round his heart for that. After recovering from a fit of asthmatic coughing, which he presently indulged in, he said, kindly enough:

"What you boys want is a walking plough, a set of drag harrows, and a disk. Even if you go in for ranching"—and his smile broke out afresh, spreading along a couple of deep grooves to the back of his neck—"you'll want them things."

"Here's the plough you want," interjected a thin, wiry, though round-shouldered man, evidently the agent in person, who had just that minute sold a blue-and-red disk to a party of pink-cheeked colonists driving a team of black oxen hitched to a vividly green wagon with a white schooner-top.

The agent grasped the long, conveniently-placed handles of a combination walking plough, bore down

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on them, which seemed much easier than raising them, besides being more graceful, and went on:

"Best plough in the world. Fourteen-inch; fin coulter—better not try a rolling coulter where you boys is going; two shares; two moldboards; two spanners; thirty-five dollars," and he continued tilting the plough up and down, causing the draw-link to tinkle musically.

"Dandy plough," said the ponderous inspector. "Use nothing else on my farms for breaking an' backsetting."

Had he explained that he used one as an anchor for his private yacht, the information would have enlightened Bert quite as much.

"Don't need a man to hold it," echoed the agent, still clinging fondly to the long handles. "Light draft; two fourteen-hundred-pound horses can draw it easy."

"Just right for light land," added the inspector, as he carefully tested and then lowered himself on to the pole of an adjacent seeder, causing it to bend like a cane. "What sort of land is it where this Colony is headin' for, anyway?"

"Heavy stuff," returned the agent, miss-cuing; "grass up to your knees. I was down in that country last fall—hunting a bunch of my stray cayuses."

"Couldn't be beat for that clay land," volunteered the inspector, wiping the inside of his whitish collar with a whitish pocket-handkerchief.

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The agent threw an affectionate look at the plough in endorsement of his chief's revised statement.

"I once turned three acres over with one of them ploughs in nine hours," he said; "with a pair of broncs you could carry under your arms."

"And you know old man Cleviss, Fred, down on the coulee?" said the inspector, who still had some breath left. Fred nodded. "He says he wouldn't sell his plough for a million dollars if he couldn't buy another like it."

"Don't blame him none, either," said Fred, opening wide his eyes, so plainly astonished was he at the mere mention of such an idiotic possibility. "A man with a farm like he's got would be crazy to part with that plough of his. Them short-handled Spiggott ploughs all go here"—he stooped down and indicated the point of the share belonging to the implement he was rocking up and down—"split clean across, every one of 'em, like a rotten twig."

"Say, Fred!—you remember when I was on the road for Spiggott's?" Fred nodded. "Why, them ploughs of theirs pretty near drove me crazy. What with that share breaking; and old Sandy Quinlan queering my expense account; and the company squeezing the poor dam' farmers, I quit 'em. Yes, sir, quit 'em stone cold. But our company can't make ploughs fast enough. Sold over two hundred this last three days. That's some

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talking point for a plough, boys, eh? I'll say. Good company, too. Repairs always on hand—ain't that right, Fred?"—Fred nodded—"Elegant company to travel for. Never go after the poor dam' farmers. Dandy company; you bet."

It is impossible to estimate how long this remarkably edifying dialogue might have continued; probably it would have gone on for a week or two, had not Sam, becoming restless, pulled at his companion's sleeve, and, with a backward jerk of the head, beckoned Bert away a little.

"Don't know wot that big bloke's gassin' abaht," he whispered cautiously, so as not to be overheard, "but 'e's a very 'appy man. Jus' look at 'is weskit, an' 'is neck, an' 'is trahsers! 'E's like one of them joints of meat tied rahnd an' rahnd wiv string. 'E mus' be tellin' the trufe, though. No man wot tells lies can be 'appy, like 'e is. That plagh's bound ter be a good 'un. Let's buy it."

So they did—being guided in the purchase of a disk and harrows by the same wonderful process of reasoning.

CHAPTER V

Saskatoon—William Trailey

SO SANGUINE is youth, and so undismayed by the future, that Sam and Bert were not the slightest bit disturbed either by the profound muddle Barr's leadership had sunk into, or by the contemplation of their long, rugged trek into the unknown. But to the calmly thoughtful, middle-aged colonists, especially those having nearly as many young children as dollars, the prospect looked dark indeed. In the whole badly-managed scheme, the only certainty these men could reckon on was the grim uncertainty of everything.

Barr added nothing to his fading reputation by appointing another clergyman to his staff—the Rev. Dr. Robbins. As far as physical beauty went, this latest addition to Headquarters' establishment was hardly an Adonis. In ability, he ranked nowhere. He wasn't even interesting. He called himself a doctor, but what of, nobody knows, for sure—certainly he never cured a colonist of any ailment, either mental, spiritual or physical. Why he joined the colonists at Saskatoon at all is a mystery. He left no mark on their affairs, unless a memory of his bulbous figure so much like that of a comic brewer's drayman can be counted one. Two

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thousand men, women and children waiting to be led deep into the wilderness by a triumvirate of parsons surely makes the Barr Colony unique, even if nothing else does.

Fortunately, the serious-minded immigrants, those with grit, and perseverance, to say nothing of self-respect and ambition, were no more affected by the behaviour of the incompetent freaks at the head of things than the weather is influenced by the planet Jupiter (always excepting, herein, the conduct of the Rev. G. E. Lloyd, whose exemplary management, when later it got its chance, set him miles apart from, and above, the others).

Having laid in a plentiful supply of cigarettes and such like things so essential to successful pioneering, Sam and Bert were quite ready for a very early departure from Saskatoon the following morning—about half-past ten o'clock, Bert suggested.

Two candles, inserted in the clefts of a couple of split willow-sticks driven in the loose soil, shed a spluttering glimmer which fought bravely with the tent's obscurity. A little oblong camp-stove, the smoke-pipe of which issued from a tin-bound hole in the sloping canvas wall, radiated a drowsy but slowly dying heat.

Everything except such articles as were likely to be needed for bed and breakfast was packed away in the wagon's bulging load outside. Bert reclined on a folding camp-bed. He was swapping

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portions of perfectly good eyesight for slabs of a horribly lurid novel. Brilliantly robed for sleeping purposes in a stunning suit of violet-and-white-striped pyjamas, with huge pearl buttons on it made from oyster shell, he presented a gorgeous appearance as he flipped the ash off his cigarette with the careless air of a rajah. In the adventuring line, he aped the splendour of the Count of Monte Cristo rather than the simplicity of style set by Robinson Crusoe.

Sam was scrawling a message on a picture-postcard—depicting a busy street scene in Regina—to send to his people in quiet and deserted London. Sitting cross-legged on three grey army blankets, which were spread out on the trampled grassy floor, he was alternately sucking at a stubby pencil in quest of ideas, and swearing softly to himself to aid him in putting them into words after he had trapped the elusive things.

Boots, belts, a dagger in a yellow leather sheath, outer clothing, and other odds and ends, were all strewn about with that delightful abandon so characteristic of young bachelors when separated from their sisters' habits of tidiness. Lending a sporting touch to the tent's somewhat bare interior, a double-barreled shotgun, loaded, leaned tottering against the canvas, close to Bert's blonde head.

Being only the twenty-fourth of April, the night was cold. A frosted crescent, slender, chill, remote, floated majestically in the velvety sky, suffusing

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the world with a luminous paleness. A scarcely perceptible night-wind breathed softly through the camp. One by one the lights in the tents snapped out, the momentary after-blackness quickly dissolving in the pale wan light of the sickle moon. Here and there venturesome stars peeped out from the fathomless recesses of space.

Horses munched contentedly in the shadows of the schooner-tops—those with anything to eat did, at any rate. A cough, a ringing laugh, the fragment of a song, broke the silence at varying intervals. Now and again voices raised in sudden argument proclaimed to wakeful ears the universal clash of human opinions.

A dog barked; another answered the challenge; soon a regular chorus burst forth; then, after that died down, two or three competed for the last spasmodic yelp with a persistence worthy of something considerably more entertaining. Then silence again.

A horse whinnied; another squealed and fought its mate viciously, for even animals fall out with one another. Near Bert's tent, someone with a gift for dairying had acquired a blue-roan cow with numbers of wrinkles on its black-tipped horns. Nature's law of reproduction, working overtime, had decreed that this rather antique "bossy" should astonish herself by again becoming a mother. Begotten of old age, the calf was slightly anæmic, so when it discovered that it had been born among a

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horde of very green Englishmen, it quietly looked round, thought to itself "Hang this lot," then calmly threw back its head and wisely died—a sample of excellent judgment which by no means deterred the mother from uttering her lamentations in spasms of ear-bludgeoning roars whenever she remembered her loss.

Occasionally the camp was enveloped in a mantle of pure silence.

Ducks swished low overhead like flights of unseen arrows. Once, high up, wild geese flying northwards sunk their hoarse notes deep into the night's chilly vastness. An ox would inflate his body, stop breathing for a few seconds, then would exhale a long, contented sigh, followed by several blissful grunts as he resumed his placid chewing of a brand-new cud.

Distances wove themselves into a veil and hung mysteriously about the tented camp. A meteor streaked down the sky like a blazing spear. Frost with icy fingers slowly gripped the surface of the earth. Drooping tents tightened and stiffened, then stood glistening phantasmally in the ghostly light, their pale, thin shadows draping the ground in angular caricatures.

From far away, there came floating through the night, a faint, melancholy wail.

"Sam!"

"Wot!"

"I think I shall go and drown myself."

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"Drownd yerself! Wot for?"

"I'm in love."

"In love! Garn! 'oo are yer tryin' ter kid? Why, yer knows no more abaht the 'uman 'eart than yer does abaht 'orses."

"Don't be facetious, Sam. This chap in this book feels just like I do. He was on his way to a high cliff to jump into the sea when his girl ran after him and stopped him, just in time. By Jove! something like that might happen to me, y'know."

"She'd 'ave run arfter 'im jus' the same if 'e'd bin goin' to a music 'all."

"You unromantic little devil! How's the water in the river over here—very muddy?"

"Not 'arf—an' ruddy cold."

Just then, from close to the tent, as it seemed, a frightful wail of anguish rose and fell agonizingly, then died shudderingly away.

"Good Heavens!" cried Bert, half rising in bed, and flinging his book down. "What's that?"

Sam was much more startled by the novel falling than he was by the cry outside.

"P'raps it's one of them blinkin' ghos'es wot comes ter people wots abaht ter die," he said. "Ain't it creepy?"

Bert shivered slightly. It was a cool night. The stove was almost out; he hadn't much on—and there was no more wood.

"Creepy! Ghastly, you mean. Somebody's

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being murdered. I know I oughtn't to say it, but I hope it's—no, I don't—he's done me no harm. I say, Sam, was there anything left in the flask? I'm simply frozen."

Again the cry of horror split the night, this time a little farther off. Sam hastily rummaged in the "tuck-box" and produced the flask, which he threw across to Bert, who was about to tip it up to his lips, when a series of rapid and violent blows shook the wall of the tent, and a man's voice called:

"Halloo! Halloo! in there. May I come in?"

Sam scrambled to his feet and hurriedly untied the tent-flap, letting in a thick-set man of medium height. He was a little past middle age, of rotund and comfortable appearance, with a well-trimmed, reddish-brown beard, and he wore a good tweed suit and cap. His eyes were big and blue, very trustful, and slightly wide open—obviously with absent-mindedness, not at all with lying. Bert recognized him immediately as a man called Trailey, who, with his wife and daughter, occupied a tent next but one to his own.

"Good evening, Mr. Trailey," Bert said affably when he saw who the visitor was. "What on earth was that dreadful noise? You didn't see anyone being strangled outside, did you?"

Trailey was blinking his eyes in the two-candle-power radiance. With podgy fingers, fat like a baby's, he gently pressed his eyelids before looking

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round the tent. Then, noticing the bed, with Bert on it, he replied:

"No, I didn't see anybody being killed. I heard some man say it was one of those coyote things that belong to the prairies. Shocking cry, wasn't it? Nearly frightened my wife and daughter out of their wits."

"Positively ghastly," Bert rejoined. "Got on my own nerves a bit. Have a drink," and he proffered the flask at arm's length.

With not the least show of enthusiasm, Trailey regarded the flask and shook his head negatively.

"No, thank you very much," he said, "I'm a total abstainer."

"Jolly good idea—wish I was," commented Bert, helping himself to a little swig. Trailey sighed a plainly audible "Ah-h-h"—very deprecatory, and very prolonged.

"Forgive my impertinence," he continued, when Bert had withdrawn the flask from his lips and tossed it to Sam with a muttered suggestion that it might as well be refilled; "but I heard you were starting for the Colony in the morning, Mr. Tresider. I wonder if you'd care to wait till we're ready—two or three days, perhaps?"

"Ye—s, certainly—that is, of course, if Sam —"

"My wife and daughter are a bit nervous," interposed Trailey, "though I don't see why they should be—having me with them. They say that

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Sam, here"—and he gave the little cockney a warm look of admiration—"is such an adaptable chap, that they'd really feel much more comfortable in their minds if they were travelling along with your wagon."

Sam, who was filling the flask from a not-quite-full reserve quart bottle, grinned sheepishly at the outspoken compliment, which had been expressed utterly without guile. He had carried water from the river for the Trailey camp at odd times, besides cajoling their fire to burn, and doing bits of things for the horses. Like everyone else in camp, they had called him "Sam" from the very first.

Bert looked at his diminutive partner less casually than usual. He was becoming convinced more and more that Sam really was a handy kind of fellow, and, in spite of not being a gentleman, extremely likeable.

"That'll be all right, Sam, won't it?"—and, without waiting for a reply, turned and spoke to Trailey again.

"We shall be delighted. We'll wait as long as you like. We're in no particular rush. How have Mrs. Trailey"—here Bert purposely assumed a slightly less solicitous air, which certainly deceived Trailey, though not Sam, nor himself—"and—er—your daughter stood the trip so far?"

"Pretty well. A little tired, and uneasy, perhaps, wondering what's before them. You know what women are, Mr. Tressider?" and, as Bert

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indicated with a solemn nod that he knew all about women, and their emotions, Trailey sighed deeply and at some length, adding:

“But we’re in the Lord’s hands, are we not?”

This remark was one of those which always left Bert uncomfortably speechless. Ever since he was able to reason things out for himself he had had a sort of vague idea that all human beings were in the Lord’s hands, some, apparently, much more so than others.

“Yes, I suppose we are,” he replied diffidently, and he felt greatly ill at ease while saying it. His respect for sacred things was deep, but, like the majority of average men, he disliked exhibiting it. Trailey, however, seemed highly gratified by the reply.

“It’s very kind of you to wait for us, Mr. Tressider,” he said—“Sam, too, of course. Drop in at our tent some time, and have a chat. Mrs. Trailey will be glad to thank you personally, I know. Good-night,” and he made to depart, but his bump of locality being rather imperfectly developed, he forgot where the entrance to the tent was. He groped round the wall for the triangular flap like a man blindfolded. First he barked his shin on the stove, almost upsetting it; then he tripped over Sam’s blankets; finally he succeeded in knocking the gun over. This was loaded in both barrels, but a merciful Providence saw to it that it didn’t go off. Though it fell with

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its muzzle pointing directly at Bert's silk-covered stomach, that gentleman was innocently oblivious of the risk. He had suddenly become interested in his own thoughts.

Sam picked the gun up gingerly and set it against the canvas. Seeing that it was his first experience with a firearm, he was sufficiently wise to treat this one with great caution. Then he went to Trailey's assistance.

"'Ere y'are, sir," he volunteered, at the same time throwing the tent-flap wide open; "'ere's the 'ole. Mind the bloomin' step."

"Ah-h," breathed Trailey, gratefully. "Much obliged, Sam. Good-night," and he vanished through the opening into the moonlit camp, walking aimlessly off in the opposite direction to that which led towards his own tent.

"That man's 'elpless," observed Sam, in a pitying tone.

"Indeed," remarked Bert absently, his mind elsewhere.

"Not 'arf, 'e ain't. 'E's a hinfant in arms. 'E's lawst nah, fer a bob 'e is. 'E's goin' rarnchin'—like us. D'yer want anuvver drink, Yore 'Ighness, before I tell James ter sling the cat aht an' farsten the kitching door?" and Sam held the flask towards Bert, whose recumbent and luxurious figure he regarded with mock respect.

"No—go to the deuce! What is Miss Trailey

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like, Sam? You've spoken to her a good deal, I suppose?"

Sam began to refasten the tent-door. He smiled mischievously to himself as he tied some weird knots in the string, fumbling awkwardly among the shadows.

"'Eaps of times. 'An'somer 'n a paintin', she is. Calls me Sam. Arsk's after my people. Inquired wot we was goin' ter do when we get to our land. She 'inted that 'er ole man's a insurance soupringtendent or somethink, an' is goin' in fer rarnchin'. She larfed abaht it."

"Oh, and then what?" Bert had snuggled down into bed again.

"Nothink much. But you ought ter see 'er 'air when she 'as 'er 'at orf. It's like an 'alo. Gawd!"

"Yes, and what else? What's her Christian name?"

"Esther."

"H'm. Pretty name—Old Testament."

"Wot's that?"

"Nothing—that is, nothing to interest you. It's the finest book in the world. People quarrel about it, which proves how important it is, I suppose. But what about Miss Trailey? Did she say anything to you about them wishing to travel along with us?"

"No, only she said sort of jokin'ly 'ow nice it 'ud be if I was goin' along wiv their waggin. You

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'aven't seen 'er eyes when she puts affecshun in 'em, 'ave yer? 'Strewth! jus' like a hactress's."

"Humph! anything else?"

"The old woman ain't so bad, neither—religiously 'n a preacher, she is, though."

Noticing that Bert had lapsed permanently into a thoughtful silence, Sam quietly crept into his simple bed, quenched the candles by flinging his jacket at them, then coiled himself up warmly for the night.

CHAPTER VI

Saskatoon—A Temperance Lecture

WHEN William Trailey issued from Bert's tent, he had but the haziest notion where his own lay. He was completely turned round. Also he was very sleepy, so much so that all the tents in the neighbourhood looked alike to him.

Even in the daytime he found it necessary to rely on the colour of his horses, more than anything else, to guide him home. He had purchased a pair of flea-bitten greys specially for that purpose; but soon the camp became filled with horses of a similar colour, tied to Bain wagons of a design exactly like his own.

Nor did the weird ghostliness of the night contribute much help to his extremely unreliable sense of direction. At last, however, after wandering about like a somnambulist for nearly half an hour, he saw at a distance a light-coloured team, so he promptly made towards it.

"Ah-h," he sighed contentedly, "here we are at last," and he commenced to hum one of his favourite tunes—"Throw Out the Life-Line."

Everything invariably came out all right in the end for William Trailey. Other people might

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try to drift along on the stream of life, but sooner or later they found themselves plunging over falls, or grounding on sand bars, or striking submerged snags. Not so he. Just when the stream began to race, preparatory to rushing over a weir, something always steered him into a peaceful backwater, where overhanging branches of trees sheltered him from the sun, and where he could—if it weren't mealtime—climb out on the grassy bank and enjoy a quiet snooze.

Nevertheless, when he stood beside his tent, a vague fancy seemed to warn him that one of his horses looked a bit different. But then horses were such puzzling creatures. How did he know that they mightn't change their colour and become cream-, or buckskin-, or even sorrel-tinted. Didn't politicians, and billboards, and dining-room walls, change their coats mysteriously sometimes? Certainly they did. Then why not horses?

Such subtle reasoning as this was one of Trailey's strong points. Had he been a soldier by profession, doubtless he would have argued that because the walls of Jericho fell down flat to the crash of Joshua's trumpets, such a feat could easily be repeated in a modern siege. It is conceivable he might have become a general in the subsequent Great War of attrition, had he been sufficiently lucky to be of military age about that time.

He now knew positively that it was his own tent he stood against, because there was the wash-

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bowl, and there was the chimney-pipe jutting out in the same place. How absurd of him to harbour silly doubts! He held his breath for a moment to listen to the far-off wail of a coyote. Indescribably sad, the dismal cry drifted across to him from out of the spectral night.

"Thank goodness I'm not out there alone," he mused.

No light shone from his tent, for the simple reason that his wife and daughter must have retired for the night. They always did. They never worried about him. Why should they? He was only a husband, and a father, of course, but he was a man. They were sensible enough to appreciate that much, at any rate. Moreover, he was now to all intents and purposes a rancher. At this encouraging thought he felt himself puff out with pride, like a suit of underwear on a clothes-line, bellying in the wind.

Another thing—had not Martha, his wife, known for twenty years and more, that, if he ever set off to go anywhere, he would ultimately reach some destination or other, even though it might not be the particular one for which he started? He might, for instance, intend to visit the library, or the museum, or a lecture somewhere, and in the end land up outside the chapel where he was accustomed to worship, but it was always all right. If the chapel presented a dark and deserted appearance, which it generally did, that made no difference. The

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meeting, or whatever it was he was supposed to attend, must have been postponed, and he hadn't known about it. On the other hand, if the place showed signs of life, which occasionally it did, he went in and made himself at home, possibly assisted in passing an important resolution or two.

No one ever dreamed of turning William Trailey out of anywhere. He was too trustful, too guileless, too delightfully detached for that. Besides, he was always wrapped in such an air of quiet dignity. He was one of those men whom, in spite of their vacuity, people cannot help respecting. Then he would go home from the meeting, or lecture, or whatever it was, and, after dispatching a quarter of a pound of ripe Stilton cheese, a plateful of pickles, and three or four cupfuls of cocoa, would climb upstairs, dreamily say his prayers, fall into bed and drop soundly asleep.

William Trailey was an expert drifter simply because he tackled effortlessness in a thoroughly effortless way. It was a gift with him, and one which adorned him as naturally as digging sewers, or "heeling" in politics marks other people out for distinction.

He was reaching over the tent to untie the flap, when, seemingly from quite close behind him, that frightful cry of despair was again repeated. Wail after wail followed each other in nerve-paralyzing succession, finally trailing away into a ghastly sob. His blood froze in his veins, and he

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distinctly felt his hair rising straight up on his head—particularly in the bald places.

Then horrible panic seized him. Ripping the canvas open, he plunged into the tent, caught his foot in the loose folds of the low wall, partly recovered himself, stumbled about blindly in the dimness, and then, with his full thirteen stone, trod plump on sleeping Sam's face.

The startled Cockney let out a fierce yell of pain and surprise, which must have wakened practically every sober man in the vicinity, and all the women. Trailey's boot was not of the mountaineering variety, fortunately, so it slipped off Sam's unlovely profile rather smoothly, if somewhat heavily, without doing much damage.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Trailey with his usual aptness. "Where am I?"

Sam sat up and nursed his slightly-abrased face with one hand, then struck a match and lighted a candle with the other.

"—— yore sole, guv'nor," he muttered venomously.

Trailey knew almost at once, even before he heard Sam's familiar voice, that he was not in his own tent. His wife and daughter slept on folding camp-cots. Moreover, Martha would unquestionably have shrieked at the sudden disturbance caused by a man bursting into her tent and standing on her face.

After the startled Trailey had mildly expressed

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his regrets, he became gently remonstrative as Sam's remarks continued being painfully corrosive in tone and purport."

"Please don't use such language, Sam," he pleaded; "there is One above listening, don't forget."

Sam glared at the penitent "rancher," now turning uplifter.

"I 'ope there is. An' I 'ope—but wot's the good of 'opin'? Yer can't 'elp it. A hinfant in arms knows more 'n you. Wot d'yer want in 'ere?"

Deep concern chased the absent-mindedness from Trailey's face for a minute or two. Sam's pointed remarks pricked him ever so slightly despite his armour of calm detachment.

"I went for a stroll in the moonlight," he hedged stoutly to his questioner, and to his own immaculate conscience.

"An' got lawst," sneered Sam.

"It's such a peaceful night," Trailey murmured, ignoring the other's harshness; "and I thought when I saw your tent and horses that they were mine. Then that terrible cry . . ." and he shuddered at the recollection.

"It's a norrible row all right, guv'ner," said Sam, beginning to drop the ire from his voice and manner. "My opinion is this 'ere blinkin' camp at Sarskatoon's 'aunted. You get ready as quick as yer can, an' let's slope orf ter the Colony ter see our land."

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"Give Mr. Trailey a drink, Sam—to steady his nerves," volunteered Bert, genially, as he sat upright and dragged a green-and-gold dressing-gown from the bed, draping it round his shoulders. "Have a little touch, Trailey; it'll do you good. It's rather a chilly night for visiting."

Precisely at the moment when Trailey's sudden entrance had awakened him, Bert was joyously riding a magnificent pinto stallion across the plains at full gallop. In fact, he was just going to bend over and pick Esther up off the ground, where she was lying directly in the path of two million buffaloes. The vivid novel, the ethereal night, Trailey's earlier visit, half a flapjack Sam had given him for supper, and the little man's glowing remarks concerning Miss Trailey, which somehow conveyed infinitely more than they described, all stimulated his romantic dreams. It was a bit of a come-down to have to talk about whiskey after soaring to such heights of heroism, but he tried to make the best of it. This absent-minded-looking wanderer was Esther's father, at any rate, and that was something.

After many weakly-expressed protestations, Trailey fell before Sam's repeated coaxing, and at last consented to try the flask. In extenuation, he said that in certain circumstances, of which undoubtedly this was one, such an act was not sinful.

Sam, with much gravity, duly absolved him.

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"Put it dahn yer, guv'ner," he urged, whereupon Trailey emptied the tiny flask like a shot, as though it were nothing but a bottle of stone-ginger. "Ah-h," he exhaled, pulling a wry face and gasping a little. In the meantime, Sam was delving into an imitation crocodile-leather port-manteau, in which he stored all his belongings, and from which he produced another half-bottleful of Scotch. He poured a reasonable quantity into an enamelled cup and held it to his lips.

"Good fer a crushed face," he said, winking impishly at Trailey, and then popped it down with that sublime faith which everyone now knows is more than half the battle of recovery.

Bert said that that beastly wailing had seriously affected his own nerves, and wondered if their visitor would object to him tasting a little drop on his own account, purely as a soporific, y'know.

"Yes, do, Mr. Tressider," rejoined Trailey, expansively. "The necessity is obvious."

"I believe I'll take Mr. Trailey's advice, Sam, if you'll—— Ah, thanks!" Sam was passing Bert a smallish dose in the cup.

Within five minutes, Trailey said he was feeling a lot better, and that he really ought to be going back to his tent, as his wife might be lying awake wondering where he was; so he sat down on Sam's blankets.

"You'd better 'ave anuvver, sir," said Sam,

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in a wheedling voice, "to 'elp keep the uvver one dahn, an' assist yer ter find yer way 'ome."

Beginning to glow with a wonderful content, William Trailey seemed only the tiniest bit reluctant, so Sam, with the manner of a fatherly retainer, partly filled the cup again and passed it to him.

"It's against my conscience," murmured Trailey; "but I'm quite sure the case warrants it. I feel that I'm already forgiven," and he passed to Sam the empty flask which he had forgotten he was still clasping lovingly. "Ah-h," he breathed, as the second portion of the flaming fluid crept along his veins and coiled pleasantly round his heart. "Just think," he said, "that this cursed drink is the ruin of thousands, yea, millions of men. Think of the starving children, and the drunkards' homes. Think of the degradation, and the prostitution, and the everlasting damnation which can be traced—like footprints in the sands of time—to the curse of strong drink. Think——"

"It's a bloomin' shyme, guv'ner," said Sam, closing his left optic at his partner on the bed.

"It really ought to be stopped," echoed Bert, smiling at Sam and at Trailey's rhetorical flight. That gentleman was fast regaining, in fact had regained, his customary placidity. The awful cry of distress was happily forgotten. He was no longer lost in a wilderness of tents. The world was a

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glorious place after all, with the millennium only half a mile or so round the corner, and beautifully downhill all the way.

Occupied with these delicious sentiments, Trailey absently refused another little touch, but, upon noticing the rather hurt look on Sam's face, he said he would try to change his mind for the sake of friendship, which he did. Almost immediately he became by turns conversational, and ranting.

Enlarging on one of his themes, he said that a cousin of his, who was a steeplejack, had one bright morning fallen from the top of a very tall church spire in Derby, whilst under the influence of a small bottle of Allsopp's beer, which he'd consumed for his supper the night before. He said that this cousin, being a very fat man for a steeplejack, had bounced off the roof of the church and landed in the back-yard of "The Pig and Whistle" public house next door; and that when the landlord rushed out to him with a glass of neat brandy, he refused it.

"Great Scott! what ever for?" ejaculated Bert ironically.

"Because he was dead, Mr. Tressider," replied Trailey with deep earnestness. "The drink had killed him, poor man."

Sam appeared to be deeply moved by the story. He said that "'e thought it all sounded very true an' feeziabale, an' jus' like one of them rotten stories wot yer read abaht in the newspypers. All the

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syne, 'e should very much like to 'ear wot the landlord did wiv the glarss of brandy arfterwards."

Trailey replied that the landlord turned teetotaler right on the spot, and threw the brandy away; which Sam, as an ex-barman, observed "was a wilful prevershun of the trufe, besides bein' a dam' silly thing ter do."

The lecturer now became still more discursive. He explained that the money spent in England in one year on intoxicating liquors would pay off half the national debt, build twenty-seven modern battleships carrying 12-in. guns, equip and maintain a home for fallen women at Okhotsk, and even then leave sufficient money over with which to erect and endow a tin-roofed temperance tabernacle at Timbuktu.

"By Jove!" cried Bert, to whom the news was a complete revelation. "Just imagine what could be done if we spent twice as much!"

"Not 'arf," said Sam, who was temporarily paralyzed by the astounding information.

"Or three times as much," added Bert, as his keen legal brain instantly grasped the significance of the statement.

As for Trailey himself, he had never paid for a drink in his life, so naturally he registered considerably less awe for his own statistics than did the others. Quite soon, being congenitally drowsy, he fell back on Sam's bed and lapsed into peaceful slumber.

Upon being prodded awake again, he asked

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Sam as a very special favour to take him home, a request the little Cockney, with his usual good-nature, readily granted.

Hastily jumping into a few clothes, Sam dexterously steered Trailey through the torn tent opening. They stood outside for a little while, ostensibly to admire the effulgent beauty of the matchless prairie night, but actually to permit Trailey to instruct the man in charge of the round-about to stop the giddy thing at once. This the stupid fellow refused to do; so, tacking along in weird, zig-zaggy spurts, stumbling over pegs and ropes, the pair made their tortuous way to Trailey's own tent, which was a matter of only thirty or forty yards distant.

Sam noiselessly opened the flap and then began gently to push his lurching companion into the opening.

"Ah-h," sighed Trailey wearily, "so here we are at last, eh?"

Responding to a sudden mood, he turned and faced Sam. Swaying gently back and forth in the light wind which still went whispering among the tents, he surveyed his little guide in quite a fatherly and tender manner.

"Sham, me bhoy," he said, "'tever you do, keep away from—hic—the curs-ed drink. It's Satan 'imself. Goo'-night," then, turning round, he toppled through the tent-door, which Sam, with his habitual good sense, was at great pains to refasten.

CHAPTER VII

Saskatoon—Martha Trailey

THE NON-ARRIVAL of a thousand-pound draft from England was firmly anchoring William Trailey in Saskatoon. He was a moderately well-to-do man. He had piled up a little wealth in the insurance line, when securing new business was ridiculously easy—in the 'eighties and 'nineties of last century. His lawyers at Leeds, where he used to reside, were slowly but surely converting into cash and costs for him, some workmen's cottages in which he had invested a part of his savings. And he was sufficiently acute to be afraid that, unless he left Saskatoon as quickly as possible, he would be compelled to cable instruction to his solicitors to dispose of another row of houses.

Because of their promise to wait for the Traileys, the departure of Sam and Bert was postponed for more than a week.

Meanwhile, like the snowdrifts surrounding it, the camp slowly began to melt away. In small convoys—never alone—the colonists started off on their two-hundred-mile journey away from civilization. Blissfully unconscious of what lay before

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them, they bravely set out to discover a new North-west Passage into Utopia.

In the romantic Crusades, beneath the banner of the Cross, the mediæval conquerors used generally to ride at the head of their followers—both in advancing and retreating. Barr did not. In this respect he was a modern. His theory seemed to be, that, if anything went wrong, and he was first over the top, he might never come back; on the other hand, if he stuck to his dug-out, and switchboard, and dispatch-box, he might save himself a lot of messy travelling. A fraction of Peter the Hermit's naked courage and stark self-denial would have made the Rev. Dr. Robbins a much more useful leader, too.

In any case, there was a huge amount of work for the Rev. Isaac M. Barr to do at Saskatoon. There was a nondescript crew of freighters to recruit and instruct, and there was a small mountain of stores and supplies to be bought, for although later on the colonists almost learned to do without food, they were inclined to treat themselves rather well at the start. Also baggage had to be found, returning colonists to be heartened, subordinates to be watched, and a multitude of minor details to be attended to besides.

The party was brimming with queer characters. These made things very interesting for themselves, and Barr, and everybody. Puritans and free-thinkers; university and remittance men; ignor-

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amuses and intellectuals; socialists and men of vision; ex-soldiers and ex-stay-at-homes; men who believed every word in the Bible was inspired by God, and men who believed everything in *The Daily Mail* was the same; Methodists, Anglicans, Calvinists, Catholics, Unitarians, Agnostics, and men belonging to twenty other sects; niggards and spendthrifts; men with brothers who were officers in the Yeomanry, and men with not a single drop of blue blood in their veins at all; men with money and very little sense; men with sense and very little money; men with both and men with not much of either; all began to dribble westwards along the Battleford trail, their eyes turned wistfully towards the only, for them, ideal life—HOMESTEADING.

Four hundred wagons at the very least commenced the trip. A few speedy colonists, travelling light, reached their destination, hunted their land, scraped the top off a couple of acres, sowed them with wild oats—and wilder mustard—and were busy hacking some innocent trees down with which to build shacks, before some of the more helpless ones even thought of quitting Saskatoon.

Quite early—a week or more perhaps—the trek began to sort out the invertebrates. These came straggling back to Saskatoon with mossy chins and bedraggled looks, reciting fearful yarns about how they had been forced to leave pieces of their backbones in sloughs; the sheen of their lovely equipment in bottomless muskegs; shreds of nerve

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hanging on the almost perpendicular walls of yawning ravines; and, inferentially, their rapidly dwindling courage in the rapacious ooze of sticky alkali flats.

At that time, the West possessed (except nearer to Winnipeg) only the main line of the Canadian Pacific, the Calgary-Strathcona, and the Regina-Prince Albert branches, in the way of railways. The Canadian Northern transcontinental had been surveyed the previous summer, and the spot in the wilderness for which the colonists were bound was where this survey bisected the 110th meridian of longitude—almost exactly midway between the Battle and North Saskatchewan rivers.

The North-West Territories had not yet given birth to the charming twins, Alberta and Saskatchewan; but the cradle was bought, any amount of clothes were ready, and numerous attendants, in the shape of future government officials, waited round to be first with their congratulations.

Whatever induced Barr to venture so far, when there was any quantity of available land nearer, is not quite clear. Probably he was the law of survival's right-hand man; or he may have fancied himself as a second Moses. There is nothing to prove that the majority of the colonists would have refused to follow him into the Arctic Circle. All they desired was "a bit of land"—*the* land, the piece officially apportioned to the Colony, and to them.

During the time Trailey's belated draft was

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delaying them at Saskatoon, Sam and Bert amused themselves in various ways. The former decked himself out in a black, satiny shirt, an article of male apparel then greatly in vogue. These soot-hued garments were not supposed to show the dirt. Some of them didn't. The idea was a brilliant one, and the inventor of such a grand, labour-saving device was doubtless well rewarded. A store-clerk in Saskatoon tried to sell Sam half a dozen of them.

"Look at this one I'm wearing myself," he said enthusiastically, pointing to his own shirt-collar, and then turning his coat-sleeve back so that Sam might see the wrist-band. "How long d'you think I've had this on?"

Sam was curious at first, then interested. He surveyed the store-clerk's collar, and cuff, then looked up in his face. The fellow was tall, with cadaverous features, and rather an oily skin.

"Dunno," said Sam, "but I should say abaht six months, p'raps."

The clerk laughed. He evidently enjoyed a joke.

"No," he said, "not that long; but I've had it on seven weeks. Ain't it a corker?"

Sam was awestruck. "Strike me pink!" he blurted out.

"How many d'you want?" asked the clerk.

Sam made a laborious mental calculation. "Give us four on 'em," he said. "An' 'ave yer got any black undershirts?"

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"No," replied the clerk regretfully.

Sam was really grieved. He paid for his shirts and departed. The thoughts of wash-day hovered over the Barr Colonists, particularly the bachelors, like concentrated nightmares. Pioneering meant more than merely doing without tablecloths, and morning newspapers, and music, apparently. Keeping clean was a problem, too—one little problem among many much bigger ones.

Bert revolved happily round Esther Trailey, with whom he was now on speaking terms. He had mixed rather successfully with numbers of attractive girls in England, had even loved a few of them with a sort of deathless, polygamous, puppy-like fervour, but there was something infinitely more fascinating about having one's favourite girl in camp with one, in a far-off land, to protect from unknown dangers.

It is doubtful whether at home in England Bert would have come within Esther's orbit. He, as a blossoming lawyer, and she, as merely an insurance-man's daughter, would almost certainly have been separated by two distinct divisions of caste, perhaps by more. But Bert was already succumbing to the democratic Canadian spirit which despises snobbishness. He was now in a country where Mrs. Tom, and Mrs. Dick, and Mrs. Harry are all equal; and where social distinctions are almost unknown; and where janitors' wives, and the wives and daughters of farmers, and policemen, and small

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shopkeepers are welcomed in the luxurious drawing-rooms of high government and municipal officials, bankers, brokers, and others of the highly-educated classes.

In any event, Esther's beauty would have bridged the social gulf pretty efficiently. She was a glorious blonde, and built as symmetrically as the Medici Venus, only not quite so robustly. She was easily the loveliest girl among the colonists. All the men under sixty were unanimous about it. Even some of the women had been heard to remark that "she certainly would be rather nice if she didn't spoil herself by being so forward."

Bert thought her anything but forward. She was as tantalizing as a mirage to him. Actually, Esther was almost as bold as a swan, and pretty nearly as brazen as a flower. An exceedingly dutiful daughter, she adored her mother, against whose somewhat nagging disposition she hardly ever openly rebelled.

"Really," she used to think when she was alone sometimes; "I don't wonder at mamma being so irritable, when she sees how fearfully helpless dad is. Fancy him sacrificing all the comfort of our dear little home in England to drag us out here to live on a ranch—or whatever it is they call it! Why, he . . . Poor old dad!" and she would smile to herself as she recollected how pitifully pathetic he had looked when one of the horses one morning had stood on his foot,

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the one with the corn on it. "Ranching!" she often mused contemptuously. "Dad should have rented one of the allotment-gardens on the Headingley Road and tried his hand at that first."

It was the third or fourth morning after her father's inspiring temperance lecture in Bert's tent that Esther laughed outright at her thoughts, which had been running along lines like those just mentioned.

"What are *you* laughing at?" her mother demanded peevishly. Mrs. Trailey was rinsing a couple of towels in the wash-hand-basin just outside the entrance to their tent. "I don't see anything to laugh at," she went on; "especially now your father has taken to drink."

"Drink! Father!" cried Esther in astonishment. "What on earth do you mean, mamma?"

"What I say—silly," snapped Martha Trailey. "He's gone and broken my poor heart," and she twisted and wrenched at a helpless towel in the extremity of her grief.

"I can't believe it, mamma. Why, father used to lecture at the Band of Hope meetings at chapel!"

"Don't I know it! And now he's brought us down to this! Mind you don't marry a man who lectures at Band of Hope meetings—they're all alike, you may depend. The Rev. Jeremiah Sittingbourne's words are coming true—every one of 'em. The very day you were christened, when he came

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for tea, and I hadn't any cake made, and I had to give him bread and butter and jam, and he asked a blessing just the same as if it had been one of my best plum cakes, 'Yes, my dear Mrs. Trailey,' he said, after he'd drunk four cups of tea, and then wiped his whiskers on his pocket-handkerchief—you remember his white whiskers all stained yellow round his mouth, don't you, Esther? 'Yes,' he said——"

"Of course, I don't remember, mamma. I was only a baby. But where did dad get the drink?"

"How do I know where he got it? He's saturated with it yet. He smells like that low public-house at the top of the High Street, where that cat, Mrs. What's-her-name, the one the chapel-folks said did away with her first husband; you know the one I mean—'The Woman in Black'—or is it Pink?—the public-house is called. Oh, dear me! what will become of us now? What with a drunken husband; and a daughter that should have been a son—and would have been if my prayers had been answered—but it's like the Rev. Mr. Sittingbourne——"

"'Sh-h, 'sh-h, mamma! here's dad coming now. One of the horses is bringing him on the end of its rope. Don't for goodness' sake let him hear you carrying on so. Perhaps he was worrying about our long journey, and——"

"Worrying! Your father worrying! Would to

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God—Oh! that ever I should say such a thing!—and me with two brothers missionaries—or would have been if they hadn't both been taken to heaven in their infancy when your grandmother Bickering was having children too fast. Mind you never have children too——”

“Mamma! Stop it! Do please remember that I'm grown up now, and may understand some of the things you are talking about.”

“Ah, my girl, you'll understand well enough if you ever get a drunkard for a husband. And you'd better watch yourself with that young fellow next door but one. Those flighty young men who wear velvet corduroy breeches generally come to a bad end. I remember the Rev.——”

“Mamma! I won't listen. Here are Sam and Mr. Tressider coming this way now. . . . How do I look in this old blouse?”

Esther hurriedly disappeared within the Trailey tent, where, among many other things, a mirror was conveniently kept.

The two young men were indeed approaching. Bert, ignoring formalities, commenced chatting with Mrs. Trailey. Sam, who had noticed the sparks falling from the good lady's eyes, went and assisted her husband to tie his horse to the wagon. Tying knots in halter-shanks was a problem in advanced mathematics for Trailey, and one which threatened everlastingly to remain as much of a mystery. He had tied hundreds of men to annual

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insurance premiums for the rest of their lives—making a neat job, too; but when it came to tying a horse to a wagon-wheel with a bit of rope, well, that was not so easy.

"I trust the howling didn't upset you the other night," Bert was saying. "It was rather an unearthly row, wasn't it?"

"Yes; and they say those animals are ferocious and will attack women and children when they are in packs and famished."

Mrs. Trailey was inclined to sacrifice everything to fluency. She turned towards Sam, who with Trailey had strolled up to the tent. She was just going off into another reminiscent flight, when the little man broke in:

"Them animals are skulkin' cowards, missis." He had evidently overheard Mrs. Trailey's last remark. "They ain't got no more nerve nor a sixpenny rabbit. That one the uvver night shut up when me an' yore good 'usband 'ere went ahtside an' made a noise like a dyin' sheep."

Mrs. Trailey went for Sam as though she had known him for years. Her face reddened, and her greenish eyes flashed fire.

"So you were with my husband, were you? And you're the serpent in his garden, are you?—tempting him, and leading him away from the narrow path. Then perhaps you can inform me where he got his drink from?"

Sam was not the slightest bit discomfited by

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Martha Trailey's anger. "I only brought 'im 'ome, ma'am," he said, with his customary good-humour. "My pal 'ere, Mr. Tressider, gev 'im a little snifter—ter keep aht the cold hair, as yer might say. 'E'd bin fer a walk dahn ter the river, ter communicate wiv 'is thoughts."

Mrs. Tressider now faced Bert, whom for some inexplicable reason she liked much less than she did Sam.

"You ought to be downright ashamed of yourself, Mr. Tressider. You've ruined my life—wheedling my poor, weak-minded husband away from the fold. Never since he signed the pledge the year we were married, and then started speaking at the Band of Hope, has he touched a drop of drink, and that's twenty-two years come June quarter-day. I remember it well, because the Rev. Duncan Mc—Mc—dear me, what was his name now, William?—McWhipple, was it? No—it must have been McNoddy, or McTavish, or some name like that. Never mind, though. I remember when he filled in the form for my husband to sign, I asked him if he knew of a public-house where we could sell the barrel of ale we had in the cellar. My husband wanted to empty it down the drain, but that seemed such a sinful waste. 'I really don't know of such a public-house, Mrs. Trailey,' the Rev. McWheesey said—Ah! that was his name; I remember now! And then he told us to try The Flying Horse on the corner, because, he said, the

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proprietor was Church of England, and would most likely allow us half what we'd paid for the ale, and so——"

"So the Rev. McWhat's-his-name was a bit of a lad, eh?" interposed Bert laughingly.

"He was sixty, if he was a day; and as good a preacher as ever came to our chapel. He was a saint, young man—if ever there was one. That's why we got him to marry us. My husband gave him four shillings for himself—two two-shilling pieces. I remember it all just as if it were yesterday. But he died soon after, poor creature."

"Ah-h," sighed Trailey, "so he did." That sleepy-eyed rancher was seated on a box of evaporated apples which stood conveniently just without the tent. "So he did," he repeated absently to himself, being careful to turn well away from his wife's challenging eyes.

Martha Trailey was a smallish woman with faded, yellow hair; and she was a scold. Also she carried the worship of cleanliness to the point where it becomes a nuisance. The husbands of such women never know the glory of dropping cigar-ash on their own carpets, neither do they experience the joy of paddling through the house in muddy boots. They slink about their own homes like lodgers three months in arrears with their board-bill, and unless they go into the furniture-removing business, so that they may with impunity upset other women's rooms, they are likely to look

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henpecked and soured, and soon begin secretly to wish they were either unmarried or dead, whichever strikes them as being the more preferable state.

Presently Esther emerged from the tent, looking as lovely as the sparkling, spring morning itself. Smiling a greeting at Bert and Sam, she stood listening to the conversation. She wore a white silk blouse, short grey tweed skirt and polished brown shoes. Her hair of burnished gold was drawn back loosely and tied low on her neck. The light from a glittering sun played hide-and-seek in its folds, while tiny currents of breeze wafted a few stray wisps of silken splendour about her face.

Bert was lost in admiration, and showed it, and, not being buried under six feet of earth, Esther rather enjoyed the sensation. Even Sam was constrained to mutter to himself—"Gawd! wot 'air!"

Esther had heard her mother's prolix reminiscences from within the tent. Thinking to make some sort of excuse for them, she said:

"Mamma is a bit harassed. She doesn't sleep very well in the tent."

"And how do you know, young lady?" Mrs. Trailey retorted, eyeing her daughter from golden crown to shining shoes in one swift glance of appraisal tinged with pride. "I notice you sleep well enough—and long enough, too; even if we are pigging it in a beastly tent—leaving your mother to wash and worry and battle with this everlasting

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dirt. Why, when I was younger than you are by three years and more, and long before I ever dreamt of marrying a drunkard"—and Martha Trailey cast a scorching glance at her husband, who was dreamily surveying a fluffy bit of cloud which hung in the crystal air like a tiny puff of white smoke—"I was scrubbing and washing and darning my finger-ends off from morn till night—H'm! there goes that dolly who was in our cabin on the boat, Mrs. What's-her-name—the one who was always pulling people to pieces—never did her hair in the morning; only half washed herself; shoes all undone; her bodice where it showed above her blouse as black as Sam's shirt there; just lolled about and talked and talked till I thought sometimes I should scream. I pity that husband of hers. Just look at the poor fellow perched on top of that load!"

"Anuvver rarncher," commented Sam, as they all turned to watch a city-bred colonist, in white collar and cuffs, driving an ox-team, which waddled past with a ludicrous, swaying gait.

"I suppose we shall look something like that in a day or two," said Esther—"mother and I balanced on top of the load, and dad driving the horses."

Mrs. Trailey snorted disgust and flung a towel across a tent-rope where she left it to dry.

Trailey withdrew his vacant stare from the speck of fleecy cloud and let it rest for a moment upon the passing oxen.

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"Ah-h," he sighed, but whether with regret, resignation, sublime content, or indigestion, it is difficult to say. It was his favourite expression, and one equally applicable to all situations. It seemed to denote a sort of fatalism, a passive "amen" to everything.

"Would you care to come for a stroll through the camp, Miss Trailey?" said Bert, apparently anxious to ease the tension obviously existing in the Trailey family.

Esther smiled consent, whereupon the couple walked off in the direction of Saskatoon, which was about a quarter of a mile away. They were a splendid-looking pair. Both were bare-headed. Esther's hair glistened gloriously in the sun. Many an admiring glance was cast in their direction as they slowly threaded their way through the camp. Youth, that incomparable ally, was heavily in league with them both.

"Did you really give father some drink, Mr. Tressider?" Esther asked presently.

Bert smiled and looked down at his lovely companion. She didn't appear to be the least bit annoyed.

"Yes—a drop. Why?"

"Mother will never forgive you. She has such a horror of the drink."

"So has your father, I assure you. He took quite a lot of persuading at first; but after he'd drowned his conscience in the preliminary gulp,

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he became quite partial to it. What is your own standpoint on the drink question?"

"I'm not rabidly prejudiced. In fact, I think a good spree would do some temperance fanatics good."

"For a Band of Hope lecturer's daughter you are a trifle advanced, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't know. Even the daughters of temperance lecturers can have opinions, I suppose—not to say tolerant ones. Some people are so occupied with their neighbours' failings that they entirely overlook their own. I don't for the life of me see what right anyone who is full of envy, and spite, and cant, and who eats as much as a pig, has to talk about a man who occasionally drinks a drop too much."

"By Jove! you're something of a philosopher. That's rather unusual for a woman, isn't it?—a young, good-looking one, at any rate."

"Am I good-looking then?" laughed Esther carelessly.

"No, you're not. You are the most beautiful——"

"Just look at the sky. Did you ever see it so far away in England?"

Bert looked at his companion's upturned face, which was rosy with blushes.

"No, I didn't. It's too dashed far away. This country would be a lot cosier if it weren't so big. But coming back to——"

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"—And this air," interposed Esther; "surely it is blowing from off a frozen sea of wine," and she opened her pretty mouth slightly, inhaling deeply.

"You evidently hate compliments," said Bert.

"I detest them. Talk about something else. What are you intending to do when you get to your land?"

Bert paused a little while before replying. The change of subject was too sudden, too much of a flop from the heights of playful badinage with a lovely young woman, to the sordid depths of reality.

"Jolly well get married—that is if I can persuade some charming girl to have me," and as Esther turned and looked at him, probably to see how earnest he was, his eyes twinkled, half humorously, half seriously.

"Some nice girl you know in England, I suppose?"

"Quite likely," returned Bert seriously—then all at once thinking of something, he abruptly extracted a photograph from his inside jacket-pocket, and passed it to his companion.

"What d'you think of that young lady—for a rancher's wife?" he asked.

Esther examined the picture with careful interest.

"I think she is a very strong-minded girl," she said coolly, as she returned the portrait.

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"You are absolutely right—she is. She's my cousin."

Esther requested another glimpse of the photograph.

"Hasn't she lovely features?" she said. "And her eyes are simply wonderful. Married, I suppose?—but I think you said so, or——"

"Yes, married, thank God! the day before we left Liverpool."

Esther returned the picture to its owner. All at once she felt generously inclined towards the original.

"She's the loveliest girl I've ever seen—in a photograph, of course. How lucky her husband must think himself!"

Bert, who was only twenty-one, whereas Esther was at least getting on for twenty, was a shade baffled by this sudden display of enthusiasm.

"Thanks!" he said, returning the photograph to his pocket. "He must. But haven't we gone far enough? Let's wander back; or, better still, let's stroll down by the river and watch the logs and trees go floating by; we can circle into camp that way."

"I should love to, but we must go straight home. Mamma will be awfully vexed if I'm not there to pretend to help her with dinner."

"Very well. Have you enjoyed the walk?"

"It's been lovely."

They strolled back. Esther was radiant. She

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was full of piquant remarks regarding the curious sights surrounding them. With an adorable mixture of ingenuousness and shrewdness she asked Bert innumerable questions, which he, in his tremendously superior wisdom, took great joy in answering.

When they had almost reached their tents again, Bert commented on Esther's high spirits. "You are evidently looking forward to our trip to the Colony, Miss Trailey?"

"Yes, I am. It will be so amusing to watch dad driving the horses, and mamma sitting on top of the packing-cases giving a thousand orders."

"And you—what shall you be doing?"

"Oh, I shall walk most of the time. I love walking."

"So do I. Perhaps we can arrange to——" but just then, annoyingly, Esther excused herself, and ran off into the tent.

Bert joined Sam, who was busily engaged with William Trailey, teaching him how to steer a team by pulling an imaginary left rein to go to the left, and an imaginary right one to go to the right.

"We s'll make a rarncher of yer yet, guv'ner," said Sam, as the intricate problem slowly percolated into his pupil's intelligence.

Trailey didn't seem at all sure about it. At the close of the lesson, he said: "Thank you very much, Sam. I think I shall be able to manage it after a few years."

CHAPTER VIII

On to Battleford

EXCITEMENT and bustle prevailed throughout the camp. Every day ten, fifteen or twenty teams, nearly all hitched to garish covered wagons, started out along the Battleford trail. Plentifully sandwiched among them were Indian, half-breed and white freighters, their worn and dingy equipment contrasting vividly with the resplendent convoys of the Barr Colonists.

The Rev. Isaac M. Barr engaged scores of teams to transport surplus luggage, stores, hospital and general supplies to the far-distant Colony. This was his great Transportation Company going into action for the first time. Blithely it charged the sticky trail. By the time May Day arrived, every slough, and creek, and gumbo flat from Saskatoon westwards for two hundred miles, was decorated with one or more mired wagons. The piercing squeaks of ungreased wagon-wheels heralded through the prairie solitudes the passage of the pioneers.

Perhaps it was because Barr's Transportation Company only just escaped being stillborn that it was so weakly. Its wagons, though driven by professionals, were quite as expert in getting stuck as were those of the colonists.

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Some families brought out pianos, and even whole suites of furniture with them, but the greater number had been content to pack their belongings into a few large-sized, hoop-ironed, wooden cases, heavy as lead. It was the more cumbersome of these pieces of luggage which broke the backs nearly, and the hearts, of the Transportation Company's drivers, when they were forced to unload and lug the massive boxes through waist-deep water.

Camp-beds, ploughs, stoves, tents, the inevitable portmanteaus—all found tottering repose somewhere or other about the piled-up loads. Infernal multi-toothed drag harrows hobnobbed with tender stove-pipes. Dismantled disks nestled familiarly against beautiful English blankets. Bags of flour and sugar committed hari-kari on projecting nails, or on jagged hooping iron, stoically disembowelling themselves like disgraced Japanese officials.

The Trailey party met many colonists trickling back to the base at Saskatoon, en route for England. Woe-begone faces—mostly unwashed and unshaved; disillusioned eyes; grubby hands, and clothes showing signs of having repeatedly been slept in, were the distinguishing marks of these panic-struck Sunday-afternoon colonizers.

There is something sad about pioneering. So many broken hearts and shattered hopes go into it. The rewards are so slim, and the drudgery is so sure. Westminster Abbey treasures the bodies of none of the Empire's scouts. They are out on the

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veldt and the prairie, at the bottom of the oceans and the inland seas, and buried deep in the heart of virgin forests. The applause of the gallery was never theirs; neither were their names honoured by being written in big newspaper headlines beneath those of murderers, prize fighters, and divorced movie stars. Apparently there is much more notoriety to be got out of robbing a bank than there is out of taming a patch of prairie; which is as it should be, perhaps, considering the difference in the risk.

When meeting parties of advancing colonists, the faint-hearts naturally offered voluble excuses for running away. They complained bitterly of the awful loneliness, and of the terrible obstacles with which Barr's Point to Point was so plentifully studded; they objected to the obvious scarcity of theatres and music halls, and to the untrodden wildness of the prairie. The very immensity, and its emptiness, frightened them.

Whenever he could, Sam made a point of asking the stragglers why they were going back. It amused him. People always interested him more than objects did. One flat-faced man, with wide-spread ears, looked back along the trail lugubriously, when Sam stopped to speak to him, and said "there warn't enough —— 'ouses up there for 'im."

"Wot!" exclaimed Sam, feigning ignorance—"not enough blinkin' 'ouses!"

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"No," replied the flat-faced man; "there's nowt up there but sludge, an' watter, an' steep 'ills like 'ouse-roofs to break yer —— neck goin' down."

"Yes, mister," added a voice, which belonged to a big, fat woman, who popped her face out of the back end of the schooner-top; "an' there ain't no schools up there, neither. That man Barr's a proper scoundril—inticing decent people away from their 'omes. Our Horice here"—Horice was hiding his genius somewhere inside the covered wagon—"wants to be a archytect; he's got a stifcate from his schoolmaster intitling him to try for a scholarship. How's he goin' to get to be a archytect up there? That's what I'd like to know, mister."

Sam tried to assume a worried expression, in sympathy with such profound concern, but he found it difficult. The woman's appearance was too comical. She had three large curling-pins in her hair, one just above each ear, and the other in the centre above her forehead. As her cheekbones were very wide, and her brow somewhat narrow, her face looked for all the world like a cross between a problem in geometry, and a boy's kite turned upside down.

The party's transport animals were both of them red-and-white oxen. While the woman had been addressing Sam, the tired brutes had flopped down exhausted in the trail. Their mouths were open and flecked with foam, and their flanks palpitated rapidly like a dog's.

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Sam turned his gaze away from the gaunt and played-out beasts. "Where are yer goin' to nah, then?" he said to the man.

Two voices replied so exactly in unison that they seemed like one: "Wolver'ampton."

"'Eaps of 'ouses there, I suppose?" remarked Sam mildly.

"Miles an' miles of 'em," said the three-cornered-faced woman, as she adjusted one of her curling-pins with a whitish hand, which was embellished with one thin wedding ornament and three or four ruby and sapphire rings.

"All the 'ouses there is joined tergevver, eh?" said Sam—"like strings of sossidges."

"They are an' all," replied the flat-faced man, with a touch of ecstasy in his voice.

"'Cept where the pubs, an' popshops, an' streets makes openings in 'em," added the woman.

At this juncture, Trailey's team caught up behind, so Sam clicked to Tempest and Kruger to move along.

With a lusty whack across the ribs with a stout poplar pole, administered to the panting nigh-side ox with marvellous dexterity, the flat-faced man warned his animals that it was time to get up. The sudden jerk, when they lunged to their tired feet, nearly threw the woman out of the wagon.

Within forty days, two or three hundred Barr Colonists were back in England. The English

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newspapers appropriately christened them "Barr Colonist refugees."

Hour after hour, and day after day, the procession of wagons creaked slowly along. Tin pails drummed and chattered. Corners of cook stoves chewed away industriously at paint-veneered, near-oak wagon boxes. Stable lamps swung like pendulums from the hoops of the schooner-tops. Plough handles, and fork shafts, and silver-mounted walking-sticks provided temporary accommodation for anything that would consent to be hung, from a lady's bonnet to the back of a kitchen chair.

Women—and ladies—who never in their lives had ridden in anything slower or more prehistoric than a tram, sat perched high up on top-heavy loads built by grave-eyed men with a blissful disregard of such a thing as centre of gravity.

Children fidgeted and cried and slept in crevices between packing-cases. Older children alternately rode and chased about alongside the teams. Miles of heavenly puddles supplied them with unlimited paddling. Untoughened skins frayed and peeled and tanned. Boots became sodden, curled up round evening campfires, then in the morning refused to be worn.

Pure light-heartedness was the prevailing characteristic. It must be confessed, though, that quite often such an admirable spirit was simply the effect of ignorance. The pitiful greenness of everyone was so acutely evident to experienced

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spectators as to be provocative of the keenest mirth. In subsequent years, some laughed—and still laugh—over reminiscences of multitudes of tragi-comic incidents more heartily than the colonists themselves.

Very few of the men had ever handled a pair of lines. Nothing in the whole range of ignorance was more obvious than that—especially to the poor, dumb brutes with the bits in their mouths. It was a ghastly experience for them. Only a very small proportion of the drivers had the faintest conception of what constituted the proper handling and care of horses. The oxen had the advantage in that respect.

But there is a final way out of every insupportable difficulty—for dumb beasts, at any rate. They could always die. Scores of horses did eventually. If they survived the hardships of the trail and the abysmal ignorance of their masters, it was only at the expense of their constitutions, which shortly afterwards could stand no more, and at last succumbed. Even the prairie-hardened spirits of acclimatized bronchos drooped, finally, in many cases, departing for an equine heaven where perhaps green Englishmen are refused admission.

Many oxen perished. Those that did not grew terribly emaciated, and looked about them with despairing eyes, probably wondering what they had done to offend the grim reaper that he should refuse to waft their own tortured spirits into the land of

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everlasting cuds, where everything was green except wagons and men.

Imitation pioneers with faint hearts, wobbly wills and rubber spines, sat back in Saskatoon, listening by day to the hair-raising stories of retreating colonists; and at night dreaming of miles of asphalted, lamp-lighted thoroughfares lined with semi-detached villas of a deadening sameness, where one could always find one's own rented house by counting either from the top or the bottom of the street.

The weaker spirits, sprouting white-feathered wings streaked with yellow, promptly flew back to England ignominiously. Others spun their feeble pluck into nets of vacillation and timidity, in the toils of which they became inextricably tangled. Yet others, shortening their horizon, and taking a reef in their vision, cast shrewd eyes at what lay nearer their feet. These developed into citizens of Saskatoon and other places farther south.

The weather still kept magnificently fine. The frost came out of the ground with a rush, leaving in its wake a carpet of purple anemones. The sun shone forth with undiminished splendour, wringing indefinable suggestions of fertility and growth from the pleasant-smelling earth.

Disappearing snowbanks fed willow-fringed sloughs to the brim. These tiny fictitious lakes sparkled in the sun like crystals. Brilliant-hued

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mallards preened themselves in their mirror-like surfaces. Lowly mud-hens sailed in and out among the grass and reeds, cheerfully challenging the broadsides from the colonists' guns long after their aristocratic relations had kicked the shimmering water into ripples and flown away.

Frogs, the only infallible harbingers of spring, rehearsed incessant and monotonous choruses. Deep-toned bassos kept them in time with rasping croaks. A shot from a gun, or a sudden shout, would turn off the music like a tap—one partly-trained voice occasionally lagging a little behind in a sort of self-conscious note.

It was through such scenes as these that the wagons of Trailey, and Sam and Bert, had been travelling for two whole days. Everything was progressing swimmingly, both literally and metaphorically speaking. In spite of detouring round sloughs, and making quick rushes at deep, boggy creeks, Trailey had succeeded in getting stuck a number of times. But always either Sam, or someone of experience, had come along and hauled his wagon on to dry land.

Then, towards the evening of the second day out from Saskatoon, Trailey, whose team was somewhat slower than Bert's, had again dropped behind. Suddenly the trail brought him up against a series of sloughs which appeared to run into each other and stretch to right and left as far as eye could

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see. Except for a few experimental wagon-tracks branching off here and there, the main trail led directly into the water.

So into it Trailey bravely steered his team, which, now being accustomed to the luxury of having its load pulled out for it, lunged along through the water for a matter of twenty or thirty yards with a very deceptive simulation of enthusiasm, and then abruptly stopped. After plunging about a bit in a highly hypocritical effort to move the wagon, the horses unanimously quit, and then calmly pretended to drink the stirred-up water which reached to their breasts.

"Gracious me!" cried a well-known voice from the top of the loaded wagon. "But there, it's just what I expected. Didn't I tell you, William, when I saw that crow fly over the tent this morning, that either somebody was going to die or else we should all be drowned in a bog? But you're so stupid. You never heed me, who's been your faithful wife these twenty years and more. If I was like some women I know—and you know, too"—Martha Trailey grew hintingly mysterious—"no need to mention names. You know well enough. You needn't look like that—as if you didn't know what I meant. I can read you like a book. That Mrs. What's-her-name, for instance, who you used to——"

"Martha, my dear," expostulated Trailey from the front of the wagon, where he was supposed to

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be driving, "please keep quiet a minute. This is rather an awkward place."

"Keep quiet!" retorted Mrs. Trailey. "Keep quiet, did you say? Well, of all things! I wonder what next. Keep quiet—yes, I should think so. William Trailey; allow me to tell you that ever since you kissed that cat Priscilla Pilkins at the Bible Class Social Evening, thirteen years ago come Esther's birthday, I've been a quiet wife to a deceitful husband. Yes, and a faithful mother, too; but what thanks did I ever get for it? Tell me that, William Trailey. You can't, you know very well you can't. And now you are doing your level best to drown us all. Oh, dear me! never any sympathy from anybody. No comfort; no home to go to—no anything," and had not Martha Trailey been so busy assisting her husband to solve his present difficulty, she would certainly have shed a few tears.

The wagon was stuck to its hubs. Viewed esthetically, the slough was really a pretty, miniature lake, and precisely the kind of duck-pond every Barr Colonist was longing to find on his private estate. Quicerly, though, the glamour of lakes was already beginning to wear a bit thin.

The other wagon, with Sam as pilot, was out of sight behind a clump of naked poplars on the farther shore. The little Londoner, as usual, had muddled safely through.

During a large part of the afternoon, Esther and Bert had been walking ahead of the teams, pre-

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sumably to scout for the bad spots in the trail, but they had lately fallen a considerable distance behind. With thoughts and emotions deliciously intertwined, they sauntered idly along. Through some mysterious magnetism, they occasionally touched one another—a shoulder, perhaps, or an elbow, or merely a finger-tip. Probably it was because the prairie was such a tiny place, that always when they examined anything, a flower, a pussy-willow, a cloud effect, they kept so close together. Great masses of smoky-white cumulus cloud rode immobile as continents in an ocean of blue. The day had been windless and warm, threatening thunder. For the prairie it had been languorous, the sort of day on which souls go looking for their affinities, and the sort of day they generally find them, too. Esther's eyes were swimming with delight, if not actually with rapture, perhaps with something even deeper still. Bert also reacted to the beauty of his surroundings. It was springtime, and he was quite a normal young man.

Esther had stopped to gather a bunch of fluffy-petalled anemones, which she had noticed dotting a sunny knoll in purple profusion. Then they had lingered to listen to a handsome meadow-lark proclaiming to himself and all the world, but particularly to his mate on a stump about a hundred yards away, what a noble fellow he was. His clear, liquid notes, pitched in a slightly melancholy

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key, just seemed to harmonize with the mood of the listeners.

The summer-like heat was playing havoc with the trails. Those colonists who had struck camp early and commenced their difficult trek, though they knew it not at the time, were far the luckiest. The frost-bound under-surface of the treacherous ground was a certain safeguard against the misfortune of becoming deeply bogged. Especially was this so where water abounded.

But the heat was doing its work well. Wagon-wheels cut into the sodden soil like sharp spades. Moreover, scores of wagons had churned the wet spots into mushy quagmires. The colonists had learned and practised their first lesson in freighting, of cutting and spreading willow bush and young poplars across the trail, but frequently in vain. Then they had been compelled to double-up their teams, occasionally to treble them, and, as a last resort, to lighten the wagons, or completely unload.

"Give 'em their 'eads," shouted Sam to Trailey from the other side of the slough. He had returned to see what had happened to the laggards. "Foller where I'm pointin'," he called, at the same time indicating with a short, black pipe to where, in his unfathomable wisdom, the bog was if anything a little deeper and stickier.

Trailey gathered himself together and spoke to his team.

"Gee up, Arthur! Now then, Freddie! Get

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us out of this pond like good little horses. Gee up! G-e-e u-p, I say; don't you hear me?"

Whilst uttering these and many other similar polite importunities, he followed Sam's advice to give the horses their heads, slackening his reins to such a generous extent as to drop one of them entirely.

"Oh, da—er—confound it! There goes one of the reins. Now what?"

"Now what! Yes, it is now what! How many times have I told you that you're no more fit to be a rancher than you are to be a member of parliament? But don't pay any attention to what I say? No, don't. I know nothing. I never did—else I shouldn't have married you, and let you drag me out here. And where's Esther? Run off with that Tressider fellow, I'll be bound."

"I shall have to try to recover that rein, I suppose," said Trailey, deaf to his wife's harangue. With a sudden inspiration, he turned round to his good lady. "Pass me an umbrella, my dear—one with a curved handle."

Most of the colonists had brought umbrellas out with them; some had even refused to part with top-hats and frock-coats. Trailey's unusual request smote his wife completely speechless for a moment or two, but she soon gave tongue.

"An umbrella! What ever for? We'll have the sheet spread out on this wagon to-morrow, I know. This sun's been too much for you." However, she

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was not dull-witted. Her husband's clever idea quickly penetrated to Martha Trailey's agile brain.

Cautiously she clambered to where the umbrella was stuck down in one of the hindmost corners of the wagon-box. The white sheet of the schooner-top was neatly folded and fastened to the rear hoop. As she scrambled along the load and stooped from her precarious position to grab the "gamp," Mrs. Trailey's face, never very pallid, partook of a hue resembling that of one of her flannel petticoats—vivid scarlet. Clutching the umbrella tightly, she reached across with it to her husband.

The nearest that William Trailey had ever come to being an athletic prodigy was when he used to climb to the top of a 'bus back home in Leeds. His figure was comfortably stout, and designed to show to great advantage in a deeply-upholstered divan; and his soft, fleshy hands were never meant for performing feats more strenuous than the manipulation of a knife, fork and spoon.

Gingerly planting himself on the near front wheel of the wagon, he reached over to hook the lost line with the umbrella handle. Arthur, the horse nearest to him, caught a glimpse over the top of his blinker of the moving mass behind him. Undoubtedly he regarded Trailey as something enormously threatening, for he gave two or three frantic leaps forward.

The sudden jerk threw the other horse, Freddie, violently backwards, and also, remarkable though

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it seems, propelled the wagon forward about a yard. Trailey, never much of a balancer, fell back against a packing-case, lost his nerve, and his equilibrium, and then, with a plaintive "Ah-h" of resignation, plopped head-first into the icy waters of the slough.

His displacement was not very great, but he made a huge splash. Besides indicating his whereabouts, several large bubbles proved that he was trying to breathe under water, a most difficult task.

"Oh-h-h!" screamed Mrs. Trailey when she saw her husband submerge. "Save him! Save my husband!" she shouted to Sam, who was watching the performance from the opposite bank; then she lapsed into an extended series of, "Oh, mercy me's!" and such like useful invocations.

Sam had a notion that Trailey's weight might be the means of his head becoming stuck tight in the mud at the bottom of the slough, so, without a second's delay, he came bounding and splashing towards the wagon.

But Trailey's head was not intended for a slough bottom. In due course, he rose for the first time, gulping and swallowing and coughing like a stricken walrus in the effort to regain his breath—a very necessary thing for a man of his age and habit to recover.

"So there you are, are you?" cried Mrs. Trailey in a tone in which accusation and thankfulness were about equally blended. "I thought you'd gone down for good. But a lot you care whether I'm

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made a widow or not. And just look at that collar I was at the trouble to iron for you yesterday!"

"Never mind 'is collar, missis," ventured Sam soothingly; "give 'im a charnce ter get 'is wind. Yore 'usband is sentimentally hunfit ter be a blinkin' diver."

"What's the matter, mamma?" called a charming voice from the bank behind them. "Father hasn't fallen in, has he?"

Esther, with her hands full of flowers, looked exceedingly beautiful as she stood anxiously regarding the scene of the catastrophe.

"You gallivanting little hussy, you!" returned her mother, slightly hysterically. "Can't you see he's fallen in, or have you eyes for nothing but pretty flowers and wild young drunkards?"

She favoured Bert with a searing look.

"Mamma!"

"I'll have you to know, big as you are, and soft as you are, that you can't go carrying on with all the fast-living scamps in this God-forsaken wilderness."

"Really, mamma!——"

"Has anyb-body got a drop of b-brandey?" wailed Trailey, who was shivering with cold and misery. "This will b-be the d-death of me," and his teeth chattered like stones in a bucket. He was a picture of wretchedness. Water and mud streamed down his face and whiskers, and his clothes dripped and clung to him in clammy folds.

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The sun, too, had dipped behind a clump of poplars on the far side of the slough, which at that time of the year meant a quick drop in temperature.

"Now what d'you think of this fool ranching business?" queried Mrs. Trailey acridly of her half-drowned husband, as she surveyed him from her pinnacle of dryness.

"N-not much, at p-present, my d-dear," moaned Trailey as he wiped his wet face with a wetter handkerchief, and then tried pathetically to hold his waistcoat away from his stomach, first in one place, then in another. His clothes were sticking to him like the skin on a snake, and revealed the curvature of his well-nourished body to perfection.

"I should think not, indeed! No one but an idiot would dream of such a thing, situated like you are. The very idea! What ever things are coming to, I don't know."

"You come on, guv'ner," interrupted Sam; "yore missis'll read the riot act till yer go an' catch a floatin' kidney or somethink. Come wiv me," and as he commenced solicitously to guide the unhappy Trailey towards the farther bank, he said: "Wot you want, sir, is a roarin' fire, a drop of 'ot Scotch, an' then slip inter the blinkin' blankits."

"Help! Help!" yelled a female voice behind them. "Help, somebody! I'm being abandoned on the prairie by a set of cowardly drunkards, I'm——"

"Gawd love us!" muttered Sam; then, turning

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round, he shouted back at Mrs. Trailey angrily: "Shut up, missis! You'll go an' wake the bloomin' baby if you ain't careful. I'll come back in 'arf a minit an' carry you acrawss—if yer'll only stop that 'orrible squealin'."

The two men waded slowly along. When they reached the middle of the slough, at which depth the water began to dribble into his watch-pocket, Trailey moaned: "C-can't we g-go round, Sam?"

"You go on yerself nah, guv'ner," returned Sam encouragingly. "Yore all right. I'll go back an' fetch the missis afore she gets the 'igh-stericks. Our waggin's rahnd that clump of trees there. That gel of yourn 'as got to be fetched yet, but I know oo'll be bringin' 'er along."

With these remarks, and having indicated to his dripping companion the whereabouts of the other wagon, the indefatigable Sam splashed back to where Martha Trailey was trying to decide whether to weep, or fly into a temper, or both.

"Climb dahn, ma'am," ordered Sam, "an' then put yer arms rahnd me neck; an' mind yer don't cling too 'ard, because I ain't used to wimming hembracin' me. Come on, nah!" he cajoled, as Mrs. Trailey showed no signs of compliance. "Don't sit up there lookin' like a statute of misery."

Martha Trailey still refused to descend from the load. Her attitude soon caused Sam, who was standing up to his waist in ice-cold water, to become exasperated.

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"Are yer comin', or aren't yer?" he repeated with considerable irritation.

"Oh, Sam! what ever will people say?" objected Mrs. Trailey, "and me a respectable married woman, too."

"They won't say anythink, missis. Bein' married makes no difference aht 'ere," mocked Sam. "But come on," he coaxed, "I'll shut me eyes if yer like," whereupon Martha Trailey, redder than ever, carefully gathered her petticoats about her still shapely legs, and then lowered herself bit by bit into her redoubtable little rescuer's outstretched arms.

Whilst Sam struggled through the water with his unwilling burden (Mrs. Trailey clung to him like an excessively modest limpet), another amusing little comedy was being staged on the bank. Obviously Esther must be transported to the other side by someone. The wagons were of no further use as ferryboats; and a single glance to right and left convinced the laggards that an attempt to circumvent the slough would only prove futile.

"Well," laughed Bert after a minute or two, "there's nothing else for it, I suppose. How d'you prefer being carried?—pickaback, or in—er—my arms?"

Esther was secretly delighted with the way things were turning out, so, of course, she said she strongly objected to both methods.

"Oh, look at mamma and Sam!" she exclaimed,

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doubtless wishing to prolong the joy of anticipation. "Aren't they a scream? Oh, do look, Mr. Tres-sider!"

Bert looked and grinned. Sam was five feet tall, and the water was nearly three feet deep. Mrs. Trailey weighed probably one hundred pounds. Her right arm tightly hugged the little man's neck, whilst with her left she held herself rigidly away from him. Her eyes were closed, but whether with fear or shame is uncertain. Her almost horizontal position across his chest compelled Sam to step as circumspectly as a tight-rope-walker blindfolded.

Declining to hesitate till bashfulness absolutely unnerved him, Bert seized his courage and his charming companion in both arms and entered the water. Though it was probably the first time Esther had ever put her arms round a man's neck, her half-shy, half-rapturous expression seemed to denote that the experience proved not much worse than she had frequently imagined it to be. Anyway, the slough appeared to be a very narrow one, though her knight was puffing plenty by the time he had crossed it, for his load was not light.

In only a few minutes, without mishap, soaked, streaming water, breathing hard, his heart pounding with all sorts of queer and pleasurable sensations, Bert set his attractive burden safely down on the opposite bank.

"There you are," he said.

Esther expressed her thanks in a few common-

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place gurglings suitable to her age and the excitement of the occasion. But her eyes divulged much more. She had very uncommon eyes. They were somewhat heavily lidded, and might have given her face a cruel or sensuous look, had not the soft, lustrous blue beneath completely offset the suggestion.

"Was I very heavy?" she asked.

Bert was wringing some of the moisture from his trousers' legs. He stood up straight and looked at his questioner.

"Just right," he replied enthusiastically. "What are you—nine stone about?" His eyes wandered rapidly over her figure, looking clear through her clothes and following the outline of her body, like the eyes of most male men can. Esther flushed deeply and looked away.

"Yes, about that," she said coldly.

"Just my ideal weight for a girl."

"Oh, really."

"Yes."

Two ducks, circling swiftly overhead, interested Esther. Down they swept close to the water, but, being unable to come to any decision about the stuck wagon, or the pair of silly humans on the bank, they rose again steeply, continuing to fly round and round. A couple of crows moped in a tall poplar which grew at the edge of the slough. They looked married. Apparently they were revelling in their first tiff. Two white-brown rabbits squatted still as

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stones not forty feet away. Safely camouflaged, they practised mental telepathy together. Frogs shrilled incessantly. Somewhere a robin was singing a vesper hymn delightfully. His mate, entranced, listened close by. Even the trees appeared to lean towards each other. If the whole of Nature had been one vast bootshop, it couldn't have been arranged in pairs more perfectly.

Bert hovered between two ideas. He was wondering whether Esther would be offended if he kissed her—or disappointed if he refrained. A most terrible predicament for a young man: and since the world became civilized, one causing a good deal of needless worry. Usually Bert did not hesitate in such matters. Bits of fluff were made for osculation. But Esther was so different. She wasn't a "blarney stone" to be kissed by every predatory male who came along. Those faintly cruel eyelids fenced her about better than any convent wall could.

She was still watching the ducks, her face tilted temptingly skywards. Bert wondered if she were waiting for him to make up his mind. All his ancestors on his mother's side were signalling to him from a celestial sphere somewhere—"Be a gentleman." His father's people, on the other hand, shot vigorous messages from some second-rate world or other—"Don't be a fool; kiss the girl." His own subconscious mind whispered: "Be damned to inhibitions."

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In the ecstasy of the moment, Bert neglected to observe whether Esther returned the kiss or not, and while he was endeavouring to remember, she ran off towards the others. Then he regarded the slough meditatively. "I wish it had been twice as wide," he mused regretfully.

Round the bend of a poplar bluff, where Sam had left his wagon, the others were making camping preparations. Sam had gathered a heap of dry wood and lighted a welcome fire. Mrs. Trailey rummaged food from the Tressider-Potts wagon. Trailey himself was shivering like an unripe jelly. He stood with his back close to the fire, steaming like a stew-pot.

"Run abaht a bit, guv'ner," Sam urged. "Try ter keep yer blood movin'." Trailey did so, but he was careful not to stray too far from the indications of supper. The smell of bacon frying rose in the twilight air appetizingly. Esther fetched slough water to make tea with. Bert went with her. They didn't say much. There wasn't any need. Mrs. Trailey watched them. "Humph," she thought, and then bustled about the fire. She was very silent, but her eyes blazed.

Esther and Bert erected his bell tent, whilst Sam salvaged the Trailey team from the slough, and then picketed all four horses safely. He was awfully afraid of them getting away. So were the others, therefore they generally left this duty to him.

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By the time supper was completely ready, Sam had carried bedclothes across from the mired vehicle, for the use of the Traileys in the tent. The other two men had almost dried off. Their clammy underclothing followed their every movement rather closely and uncomfortably, but supper diverted their attention. The ladies tried to persuade Sam to divest himself of his saturated garments and wrap up in a blanket.

"Yes, do, Sam," pressed Mrs. Trailey. "You'll go and get rheumatics as sure as I'm a Christian woman. I remember when the Rev. Peter Mackenzie preached at our chapel about Jonah—or was it Moses, William? It was somebody in the Bible who got wet, I know that. However, Peter Mackenzie said——"

"Lor' love a duck!" ejaculated Sam disgustedly, thinking Mrs. Trailey was off on one of her extended reminiscent tours.

"No, young man, he didn't say any such thing. And don't blaspheme. If you were to go and catch your death of cold in those wet things, you'd as like as not go straight to hell. Go into the tent now, and take those wet trousers off, and let me dry them by the fire for you."

Mrs. Trailey really liked Sam. On several occasions she had evinced a queer kind of tart fondness for the little man. She stitched buttons on for him; and once she had bandaged a nasty cut on his hand.

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"Now do as I tell you," she insisted. "I remember Esther's grandma once saying——"

"Lor' lumme, missis, try ter forget somethink fer a change," Sam interposed rather brutally. "An' as fer me gittin' a hillness, such a thing ain't likely to 'appen. If a bloke 'as no pain 'urting 'im, 'ow is 'e ter know wot's the matter wiv 'im? There ain't no doctors aht 'ere, missis, y'know."

It was Sam's mock serious manner rather than his weird logic which quelled the argument. The sun had long since slipped out of sight. Everyone was thoroughly fatigued. Nevertheless, Mrs. Trailey persisted in having the few supper things washed.

"'Ere, ma'am," offered Sam, "I'll tyke 'em dahn ter the slough an' do 'em for yer," and while Mrs. Trailey remonstrated with him, he commenced to gather the pots into a bucket energetically.

"Oh, no, Sam; I'll——"

"You go ter bed, missis. I remember 'earin' me great-gran'muvver, the one wiv the pink eyes an' a blue nose——"

Sam's little burlesque worked. Martha Trailey went into the tent. The others had retired earlier.

The Traileys in the tent, and Sam and Bert in the covered wagon, slept the sleep of pioneers. Already they were dovetailing themselves into their new environment; already they were shedding tomfool notions of polo ponies, and ranching. Slowly but surely they were acquiring fresh aspirations, and, in the case of two of them, fresh emotions.

CHAPTER IX

An Early Morning Shoot

SOON after daybreak, the corner of a packing-case sticking into his ribs pried Sam awake. Rays from a young but powerful sun soon filtered through the canvas of the schooner-top and burned his face with a congestion of heat. His feet, which had become uncovered during the night, were tangled up with the chilly anatomy of a combination walking plough, and were stone cold.

"Hey, Bert!" he called. "Wyke yerself up!" and he jerked the blankets off his still sleeping partner.

Bert blinked and yawned and came down to earth with a peevish flop. Fishing about among a drift of clothes and blankets for a cigarette, he said petulantly:

"Damn you, Sam! Why can't you let a fellow sleep?"

Sam merely grinned and lighted a cigarette. The best speeches are never made at dawn. Bert had again enjoyed a remarkable run of dreaming. First he had performed the hat trick twice running in a county cricket match; then, after running through the admiring crowds to the pavilion, he had

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hurriedly changed his clothes and carried a pretty girl clear across the Atlantic, and three-quarters of the way over the Pacific. Then a liner had come along and picked them both up. The Rev. Isaac M. Barr, strangely enough, happened to be the boat's chaplain. He persisted in wishing to marry them, because—as he was very careful to explain—besides being a parson, and a colonizer, he was a man of God, and that therefore he, as an unrivalled exponent of true morality, must insist on their marriage. Bert was just about to agree when Sam wakened him.

Except for boots and coats, and on Bert's part a white, soft collar and coloured tie, they were already dressed. After a little swearing, and cigarette smoking, and the exchanging of a few flashes of bilious humour, in the usual manner of camp life in the early morning, they threw open the sheet and trickled out into a perfect spring day.

The chilly dawn had condensed the last few shreds of a lambent ground mist into myriads of tiny dewdrops, which a thirsty sun was fast licking up. Sam contrasted his surroundings with those he had been used to. He filled his mouth with cigarette smoke and blew it in the air, arrogantly.

"Let's go shootin'," he suggested, suddenly.

"Right you are, Sam, me lad," agreed Bert, who as soon as he came in contact with Mother Earth immediately regained his good-humour.

They procured two guns (one of which was Trailey's, loaned to Sam a day or two back)—

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from a niche between a couple of cases on the wagon, and then, with many pocketfuls of shells, set off to hunt.

First they tried the slough for duck. Trailey's wagon was still there. It hadn't moved, unless it were nearer the centre of the earth a trifle. It presented a queerly forlorn aspect, so blatantly new, so realistically tragic, so suggestive of the seamy side of colonization.

Bert stopped a moment to regard it, meanwhile stuffing a couple of shells into the breech of his gun. After snapping it to, and duly cocking the triggers, he slowly swung the muzzle past Sam's head and pointed it at the wagon.

Sam ducked. Instinct warned him that bags of trouble lay lurking within those twin barrels. Still pointing, Bert said:

"What about that wretched wagon of Trailey's? That's the first job to-day, I suppose?"—then, noticing two large ducks cutting the air high up above him and beginning to dart slantingly with rigid, down-curved wings towards the water, he hastily aimed his gun, shut his eyes, fired both barrels so that their detonations overlapped, and then collapsed backwards on the grass, rubbing his right shoulder and muttering to himself.

As the ducks were only two or three hundred yards away when he fired, they were a good deal scared, and forthwith left the locality. Doubtless, they reasoned that nice, quiet sloughs were suffi-

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ciently plentiful. And besides, flying cost them nothing.

"Lumme!" exclaimed Sam. "That must 'ave bin close; they've flew away quackin' like 'ell."

Bert was still rubbing his shoulder.

"Blast 'em!" was all he said.

"You've missed yore blinkin' potation," observed Sam; "you ought to 'ave bin a sodger."

"Vocation, I presume you mean?" growled Bert, crossly.

"Never mind wot I mean. I notice a lot of people can say things they can't do. Talkin's easy—easier 'n shootin'. 'Ow would it be ter walk rahnd a bit? We might get a pot at some of them grouses wot this country's lousy wiv?"

Bert, being a thorough sportsman, acquiesced; so, after quietly cursing his gun a little more, and then reloading it, they made off.

When they reached the edge of the slough, they turned to their left, keeping the water in sight, partly so as not to lose themselves, but chiefly because they spied a cloud of ducks blackening its surface in the distance.

Presently, without warning, up popped a prairie chicken right from under their feet—then another, and another. Bert at once let fly with both barrels—one at a time—more or less in the direction of the birds, but without effect. The chicken lighted not far off, so the gunners were again soon within range. This time, not being taken by

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surprise, the birds merely strutted about, chuckling and clucking to each other, apparently enjoying the fun immensely.

Bert's morale was still excellent. Taking careful aim, he distributed to the covey another broadside. Whether it was taken sick, or whether it was shamming, only a real hunter could tell; anyhow, one of the birds keeled over, giving every indication of being a casualty.

"Strike me pink, if you ain't 'it it," whispered Sam admiringly.

Bert was trembling with pride, joy and surprise, but he said nothing. Vastly bucked, he threw his gun down. Having thus lightened himself, he scampered madly towards the wounded chicken. Much more soberly, like a reserve force generally does, Sam plodded along behind.

Bert stooped to gather his first kill, but the bird hopped briskly away. Placing itself slightly beyond reach, it stared wonderingly with wide-open eyes, then trotted off with amazing speed and gusto in the direction of a large coppice, which was placidly sunning itself on the edge of the battlefield.

In and out among the bushes the chicken ran, with the two youthful colonists hotly in pursuit. Being the only one armed, Sam seized a favourable opportunity to fire, but except for jarring his shoulder, the shots appeared to have no other effect than to stimulate the bird to weave its charming

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little self in and out of the trees with greater zest than ever.

The gallant Nimrods conducted the chase for nearly half an hour. At length, lying down like a Bisley wizard, with his gun resting in the fork of a willow, Sam blew the chicken almost to bits at approximately six paces—with both eyes shut.

Seeing nothing else in the neighbourhood to shoot at, the hunters decided to retrace their steps. Sam carried what remained of the pulverized bird. Bert smoked a cigarette jauntily, and kept a sharp look-out for his gun. But the stupid piece of ordnance refused to reveal itself. And soon it began to dawn on them that besides being unable to find the gun, they were quite uncertain where they were themselves.

"Here's a nice go," said Bert, when the knowledge that they were properly lost was assimilated.

Sam stood still for a minute or two, dropped the chicken, then scratched his head to assist reflection.

"Ole Barr never said anythink in 'is parmflets abaht us gettin' lawst, did 'e?"

Bert was having another good look round at the landscape. "No, he did not," he replied. Except heavenwards, he was unable to see much. The view horizontally was blocked by thickets of small brush. Openings here and there led into pretty little glades similar to the one they were now in. A quarter of a mile or so above them two hawks wheeled majestically.

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"What are you supposed to do, Sam, when you get lost on the prairie?" Bert presently asked in some bewilderment.

Sam said he "'adn't any idea; but 'ow would it be ter fire orf some cartringes?"

Bert was pessimistic. "Dunno," he said; "but try it, and see;"—so Sam commenced a regular succession of double shots, which echoed through the wilderness, disturbing its lovely peace horridly. When he had used up his ammunition, he said—"That's wot them blokes in books calls a distress single."

Bert was exceedingly interested. "Oh, is it?" he said.

"It is an' all, my son," said Sam; then happening to find a stray shell in one of his trousers' pockets, he shoved it into his gun and fired it at an isolated poplar, which rather foolishly was trying to grow up alone. "Tyke that, you——!" Sam muttered below his breath. A vindictive gleam quickly fading from his eyes, he turned to Bert and said laughingly: "Jus' fancy if that blinkin' tree 'ad bin tne Reverend Docter Robbins—eh?"

"Yes, just fancy," grinned Bert, not at all reluctant to dally with the charitable thought. "But I fail to see what good your bally antics are doing us," he continued, adopting a more serious manner. "There's no one but Trailey about, and he could never find us. The old boy ought to halloo, though."

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"Trailey 'alloo!" ejaculated Sam. "Wot d'yer tyke 'im for?—a bloomin' slavey shahtin' fer a cab? 'E'll be too busy eatin'"—then witheringly—"or else gettin' 'is waggin aht of the slough."

"Shut up trying to be funny, Sam! You seem to think this is a laughing matter. It isn't, though. That's the trouble with you unimaginative people. You never realize the gravity of anything. Has it struck you that we might be lost for days?"

"We've bin lawst ever since we left Liverpool, if you arsk me anythink," Sam retorted. "Canada's an 'ome fer lawst Barr-lambs. This 'ere trail ter the bloomin' Colony mus' be strewed wiv 'em, like—like——"

"Like Napoleon's bally army retreating from Moscow—eh, Sam?"

"Blimey, yus."

At length, Bert's superior education asserted itself. His highly-trained intelligence sorted out from a maze of crowding ideas one which for sheer brilliancy was worthy of a better reception.

"How would it be," he suggested, "if you were to go that way"—pointing in the general direction of Lake Winnipegosis—"and me this?"—indicating with a comprehensive sweep of his arm a patch of territory which included a large portion of the Rocky Mountains and most of British Columbia.

Sam sniffed scornfully. "An' lose our blarsted selves separately instead of tergevver!" he replied. "Wot funny ideas you've got."

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But the difficulty was solved for them in a highly-unexpected way. A horseman came riding towards them. Hidden by numerous clumps of trees, his horse's tread muffled by the thick carpet of dead grass, the stranger was almost upon them before they knew it. Quite leisurely he walked his horse to within a few yards of them and then stopped. It was a mild disappointment to Bert that he did not gallop up and throw his foam-flecked steed abruptly back on its haunches. His presence was an immense relief, though; and his scarlet tunic was a very welcome splash of colour on an exceedingly sombre outlook.

Sam picked the chicken up. The thought flitted through his mind that although he never had liked soldiers, "'e thanked Gawd fer this one"—the usual prayer in desperate times.

"What's all the shooting, boys?" questioned the horseman cheerily, bending over and caressing the neck of his big bay. "Is there another rebellion breaking out?" He was a slimly-built, dark, good-looking constable of the North-West Mounted Police, wearing a long, slender moustache and distinguished by an agreeable voice.

Bert was for the moment too absorbed in admiring the rider's picturesque turnout to reply, so quick-witted Sam said: "We don't know where the 'ell we are. We've bin shootin', an' got lawst."

Although careful not to show it, the policeman had noticed the wreck of the chicken.

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"You boys got plenty of meat in camp?" he asked. His manner was faintly official, though quite courteous.

"Yes," replied both hunters.

"Well, don't you know you aren't supposed to shoot chicken at this time of the year, except in case of emergency?"

"No," said Sam innocently, "we don't know anythink. We belong ter Barr's party."

The horseman laughed and allowed his eyes to dwell for a second or two on Bert's velvet cords. These were fast losing their original glory.

"Englishmen, I guess?" ventured the policeman, just a wee bit accusingly. (Englishmen were considerably less popular than their money in those days.)

"Yes, we're Englishmen," remarked Bert, apologetically, as befitted a member of a race which has done almost nothing for the world and humanity.

"H'm-m, thought so. And lost, are you?"

"Yes."

"You boys follow me, then," and, wheeling his horse with a gentle pressure of knee and rein, the policeman started off at a slow walk.

"'Ere, Capting! 'old on a bit," called Sam. "Wot abaht our uvver gun?"

The rider pulled his horse up and looked round, smiling broadly at being so rapidly promoted.

"What gun?" he demanded.

"We've lawst anuvver gun somewhere," ex-

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plained Sam. "My mate 'ere laid it dahn a minit while we ran arfter this blarsted chicking," and he held up the poor, mangled bird, quickly permitting his hand to fall again.

"In which direction?—and how far?—and how long since?" asked the policeman, still smiling.

"Arsk me pal, 'ere," replied Sam with a touch of malice in his tone. "'E knows," and, turning to his companion, he added—"don't yer, Bert?"

"Go to blazes!" snapped Bert under his breath, as the horseman surveyed him with twinkling eyes. Aloud, he said: "This country looks everywhere the same to us, officer. How on earth *do* you manage to find your way about, when all these bally woods and things resemble each other so much?"

"You boys oughta keep track of the sun," answered the policeman; "and get wise to the direction of the wind; and learn all about the points of the compass—north, south, east and west, y'know. You're liable to get into all kinds of jack-pots if you don't. But you'll catch on in time, I guess."

"Splendid idea, that, Sam—noticing where the sun is," said Bert.

"Even if you are Englishmen," continued the policeman, "you boys'll likely know that it rises in the east?" and he waved with a gauntleted hand to where the sun was pouring streams of dazzling brightness from a greenish-blue sky.

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"Yes, we know that much, I think," observed Bert quietly.

Sam, who liked his streets named, said: "But 'ow d'yer know which is east, Capting?"

"Why, where the sun rises, of course."

"An' if it 'appens ter be foggy, or rainin', or the sun is obskewered by a lot of blinkin' clahds—wot then?"

"In that case, it's best to watch the wind."

"An' suppose there ain't no wind—then wot?"

"Then you use your head," returned the policeman slightly impatiently. "But come on," he said, "let's poke around some and see if we can find your gun," and he pushed on again, Sam and Bert following closely behind.

"Do they pay you blokes anythink extra fer givin' lessons ter Barr Colonists in fizzy-ology?" Sam questioned of the policeman after a short silence.

The horseman, not being quite certain to which "ometry" or "ology" the subject lately discussed belonged, remained silent. He pretended not to hear the remark. Probably he sensed his leg being gently pulled. Sam chuckled to himself.

A good many open spaces were searched, somewhat superficially, but no gun turned up. At last they decided to abandon it. An excellent firearm, it had been presented to Bert by his father. It had cost thirty guineas. Perhaps it is still lying out there in the grass, rusted, and burned by prairie

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fires. It is conceivable that it may accidentally be discovered in about a hundred years' time. It may provoke discussions about an extinct fauna. The maker's name on the barrel may serve as a reminder of the days when English was the leading language of the prairies.

Bert was considerably envious of the policeman's graceful and romantic mien. He actually went so far as to wish that he himself belonged to such a force. "What a fine-looking chap," he thought as he walked at the horse's heels. There was a suggestion of security, and self-reliance, and broad-minded justice about this rider which was distinctly attractive. He had been deputed by the Commandant of C Division of the North-West Mounted Police at Battleford to patrol the trail along which the Barr Colonists were trekking.

After relinquishing the search for the gun, fifteen minutes brought the little party into camp. Trailey had been driven by repeated henpecks to start a fire, and the ladies already had breakfast prepared.

"We really thought you were lost," Esther said to Bert, her anxiety giving way to relief when the wanderers strolled into camp. "But when we heard you shooting we knew you were all right. Since the firing stopped we have been a bit worried, though."

Sam winked at the policeman. "Don't you ever worry abaht us, miss; we know our way abaht, don't we, Captng?"

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"Sure," laughed the horseman, removing his eyes from Esther for a fraction of a second. He still sat his horse. Bert perceived how he and Miss Trailey were momentarily smitten with each other. Mounties used to see girls like this one only in dreams; and handsome, red-coated horsemen, more like cavalry than policemen, will cause any romantic female's heart to flutter.

Pressed to stay for breakfast, the rider politely declined food, but accepted a cup of coffee. He said he had bivouacked and breakfasted with some Devonshire people a mile or two farther along the trail. Dismounting, he slipped an arm through his bridle rein, and stood sipping the drink, whilst his horse tugged to be free to nibble away at the tawny grass. He was a tall man with strong features and clear, blue eyes. The great, wide spaces had painted a vivid picture of health on his pleasant face.

He proved to be a highly-interesting fellow, too. His prairie experience reached back to the Riel Rebellion. Between glances at Esther, he contrived to let drop much useful information, without seeming to be preaching, or tendering advice.

As he remounted to depart, Sam, with many recollections of London bobbies, tipped him a wink and went through the motion of drinking something from a phantom cup, an invitation which all over creation means but one thing.

"No, thanks," said the mountie; "I never touch it." In explanation of his refusal, he said the

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constables of the N.W.M.P. were all of them rigid teetotalers—a statement which to Trailey was conducive of the keenest gratification, but which surprised Sam almost to the point of shock.

“Keep your eyes skinned for that Eagle Creek,” shouted the horseman warningly as he rode away.

CHAPTER X

Indian Freighters—Eagle Creek

NOTWITHSTANDING Mrs. Trailey's covert opinion to the contrary, Bertrand Paul Tres-sider was not entirely devoid of ideas. True, he had been educated at one of England's most ancient, and, therefore, most noted, preparatory schools, which, like all others of its kind, annually turned out droves of mediocrities. Sparring with the gods of Greek mythology, wrestling with the heroes of Roman history, and dabbling in other ancient and dead things, though ruining many good men's chances of excelling as first-rate stevedores, or potmen, hadn't spoiled Bert. The very fact of his cutting loose from the fustiness of English law in order to join in Barr's search for a prairie Elysium proves that. And his training among Yorkshire men, in a Sheffield solicitor's busy office, had taught him that indubitably five beans counted five. No one, no matter how finely educated, can mix for very long with Yorkshire men without learning that much. If the beans are represented by pounds, or even by halfpence, the knowledge is usually acquired very quickly.

All morning, on and off, Bert's mind had reverted to the unthankful task which lay before

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them of releasing the wagon from the slough. He quite realized that a good deal of wet, dirty, cold and laborious work would be involved in the job.

He soon broached a suggestion to Trailey. The ex-insurance superintendent had finished his breakfast, and was seated on the wagon-pole, absorbed in dislodging a refractory morsel of bacon from a hollow tooth by the aid of a stiff stalk of grass. Thoroughly imbued with gentlemanly instincts, he stopped toying with his teeth when Bert addressed him, and became dreamily attentive.

"How about paying some of these Indian chaps to pull your wagon out of the slough?" said Bert. "You don't feel like tackling the job yourself, I suppose?"

Trailey didn't exactly leap at the idea. He never leaped at anything. "Ah," he drawled, "that doesn't sound like a bad suggestion."

"Well," went on Bert, "it's your wagon, y'know; and getting it out may cost a trifle, and all that, but I'm sure it's the wisest thing to do." Bert's Yorkshire training cropped up here—making it perfectly clear that there must be no mistake about who would be liable for the cost of the work.

Esther overheard the proposal, and endorsed it very heartily. She said she thought the scheme was an exceptionally brilliant one, and conveyed to its originator, by means of a swift glance of admiration, her opinion of how absolutely unique she thought it was. This powerful stimulant sent

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the blood rollicking through Bert's body so fast that he remained silent for a little while so as better to enjoy the sensation.

Martha Trailey, full of memories of the previous evening's incidents, clinched the suggestion with a few appropriate remarks about "girls gadding off with wild young harum-scarums, while she was left to drown in a bog."

"You may as well decide to let the Red Indians do it," she said to her husband, after she had made several extraneous references to his past career, chiefly to do with his early married life. "At present," she continued, "you've more money than sense; but goodness knows what will happen to us when it's all gone. Oh, dear me! well might my Aunt Rebecca say the very day I was married, that, although she detested mentioning it, she had an idea I might possibly live to rue it."

Sam and Bert, noticing the finger of Mrs. Trailey's barometer moving rapidly round to "stormy," edged quietly away from the tent, outside of which the discussion was taking place.

"You shouldn't talk like that before strangers, mamma," Esther remonstrated gently; "it makes every one feel so uncomfortable."

"Strangers! Strangers, did you say? Well, what next, may I ask! Strangers!—and after we've been carried across the pond with our arms round their necks! Allow me to tell you that the very thought of it makes my blood boil; and

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so it would yours if you weren't so brazen. What young women are coming to these days, I don't know. And in broad daylight, too! Why, I remember when I was your age, no respectable young woman would dream of putting her arms round a man's neck till after it was dark. Please don't forget that, my girl."

Naturally, that settled the matter. Quite soon along came the usual tribe of Indian freighters—a whole string of them. Bert shouted across the slough to half a dozen of the men who were investigating the crossing. He motioned vigorously towards the mired wagon, and made pregnant signs indicative of dollars being counted out.

In a calmly stoical sort of way, the Indians seemed quite interested. Unhurriedly, they condensed a few thoughts into fewer words, which they communicated to each other, after which they made signs that—for Indians—they would be tickled to death to come to some arrangement. Seeing that the worship of money was one of the religions the natives had picked up from their white brethren, their consent was understandable enough. Two active young bucks jumped on a couple of spare ponies, numbers of which slunk about the convoy, and rode through the slough to negotiate terms.

Two or three dusky women of uncertain age and beauty gabbled away to each other, pointing at the bogged prairie schooner and laughing.

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The ladies seemed to take a much more humorous view of life than did their men-folk. They squatted atop of their loaded wagons like images of fat Buddhas togged out in green, purple and pink robes.

After much argument, during which the two dark-skinned ambassadors preserved a dignified reserve, contrasting strangely with the comical gesticulations of the civilized white men, the transaction was at last completed. The payment for extricating the wagon was to be ten dollars. The aboriginal votaries of materialism stuck out grimly for cash in advance. Possessing the whip hand, they got it.

"Give 'em the money," said Bert, addressing Trailey, who had wandered down to the water. Sam watched carefully whilst the transfer of the cash was made. "It's dirt cheap, guv'ner," he said, encouragingly. He was glad to be rid of a job which would have devolved mostly upon him.

Four teams of cayuses were hooked to the bogged wagon—two to the pole, and one on each side, to the box. Then, with a mixture of whoops and whips, chiefly the latter, about two-thirds of the ponies took it into their heads to pull the load—and the rest of the ponies—across the slough. The drivers splashed through the water alongside, apparently enjoying its coolness.

Some of the natives looked as solemn as though they had just drawn a hearse full of dead medicine-men through the water. Others cast sly grins at

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the white party. When they had all jumped on the bony backs of their ponies and returned to their own convoy, Sam and Bert, with a little assistance from Trailey, commenced to pack up.

That evening they reached the gash in the earth known as Eagle Creek.

Sam strolled to the edge of the ravine and stared into the shadowy depths. "It's too bloomin' late ter commit sewercide ter-night," he decided. "Gawd! 'ave we got ter go dahn there?" he mused, awed by the fearsome steepness of the trail.

So the little party camped for the night beside the coulee. Thanks to their outdoor exertions, the high, clear altitudes, the ever-changing scenes, and the freedom from the worries, both petty and large, of congested humanity, they all invariably slept like tops. Sam and Bert and Esther were enjoying to the full every second of their lives. They extracted pleasure from the fascinating novelty of everything, like bees do honey from flowers.

As for William Trailey, he was hardly on the earth at all, except for meals. "Ah," he would sigh whenever anything particularly startling or novel was pointed out to him, and then his big, dreamy, blue eyes, after taking in the object, would go soaring with his thoughts in long, wandering journeys through realms of abstraction. What really were his visions, and ideas, and ambitions, no man knew, even if he did himself.

Martha Trailey was perfectly contented to

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be discontented. She cooked, and washed, and rattled about in energetic storms of striving after a sort of super-cleanliness. Her pots and pans and utensils were all clean and polished as though they had been lined up in her kitchen back home in England. In return for this monumental efficiency, all she desired was to be able to make it impossible for her husband to forget that he was married.

Eagle Creek, whatever it is now, was in those days an awesome chasm on the Saskatoon-Battleford trail. Probably half a dozen lively recollections spring to the mind of each Barr Colonist as he searches the recesses of his memory for pictures of far-gone days. Dulled a little by distance, perhaps; made a trifle cobwebby by time; and, possibly, half-buried under a litter of subsequent experiences, but totally eclipsed by no other event, is the clear remembrance of the crossing of Eagle Creek.

Many Barr Colony legends originated here. Numerous foolish experiments for descending the slopes of a ravine as steep as a house-roof were attempted. The biggest wonder is that no one was killed. Not a few colonists strove to leave their bones there—unintentionally, of course, but none the less with considerable perseverance.

It has for years been widely broadcast, that, in an effort to defeat the gravitational urge of his thirty-hundredweight, top-heavy load, one chap hobbled his oxen. This is a gross distortion of fact. He hobbled only one of them.

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Sam knew the fellow. He was a dark, sallow, melancholy-visaged man from Shropshire, which is a buffer county between England and Wales.

"Wot made you 'obble one of yer bloomin' hoxen when yer went dahn Eagle Creek?" Sam asked him several weeks later when they met at Headquarters camp (Britannia).

The Shropshire man pulled a wry face. He was very despondent—more so than usual. "I didn't care a hang what 'appened to me," he replied glumly.

Sam was very sympathetic. "Why?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Somehow, everything seemed to be going wrong." Smiling a twisted smile, the Shropshire man went on: "You see, my blessed bulls were green, and you couldn't hold 'em back with the ropes on their horns. My wife wanted to turn back all the time. I'd been wet to the skin for three days. Two of my youngsters had the whooping-cough. Barr had one hundred and seventy-five pounds of my capital, which I'd said good-bye to, of course. And, then, blow me if I hadn't found out at Saskatoon that Barr had given the other three 'omesteads on our section to two Welshmen and a Lancashire man. I tell you, prospects looked none too rosy."

"So yer thought yer'd try an' do away wiv yerself—eh?"

"Ha-ha!" cackled the Shropshire man sardonically; "I may have been unlucky, and a trifle

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down-hearted, but I wasn't as far gone as that." His voice was very husky with talking to his bulls, which hadn't died yet.

There were runaways galore at Eagle Creek; but the stream at the bottom, and the steep rise beyond, stopped most of them. Inertia decrees that a body in motion shall tend to continue so. Some colonists attempted to outwit this law. They zig-zagged down the declivity. This was all right till one of the wheels on the high side hit a stone or a knoll, then over went the wagon, shooting its conglomeration of packing-cases, harrows, stove, and everything else down the bank like coals being tipped into a cellar.

Only six weeks previously, these colonists had been seated in offices pushing pens over paper; selling shirts across mahogany counters under the watchful eyes of lordly shop-walkers; teaching sleepy children in Sunday school the tale about the Israelites trekking into Egypt; catching the nine-fifteen to business every morning, with a weekly half-day for a football match, or a fish in the river; enjoying the numberless advantages of a cultured land, from the daily halfpenny newspaper to listening to the thunder of an organ in a five-hundred-year-old cathedral—and now here they were, gazing over an abyss which had to be crossed before they could arrive at the land of promise—Barr's promise. No wonder some of them, when they looked into

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the yawning depths of Eagle Creek, suffered an attack of faint-heartedness, and straightway turned back.

But the stimulating fact remains, that easily three hundred teams, driven by the greenest aggregation of men who ever came to the West, contrived somehow or another to cross the creek safely.

Early the following morning, Sam piloted each wagon in turn down the precipitous slope. The rear wheels of both vehicles were locked with heavy logging chains. Professional freighters, who also had camped at the creek, instructed him in the art of tying the chains so that, besides being non-slipping, they contributed their greatest braking effect.

The chains were allowed to become taut at a point which brought the half-hitch sufficiently near to the ground to dig into it. With both hind wheels gripped by such knots, which themselves were gouging into the trail, the descent was rendered comparatively simple. Both teams were free from the mysteries of breeching tackle. Only Sam really knew how to harness the horses properly with the leather puzzles they already possessed, though Bert and Trailey were slowly learning.

"Thank God for that!"

William Trailey uttered these words as he gazed at the awful declivity down which the wagons had been guided by the indispensable Sam. The

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little party was resting on the bridge which spanned the tiny stream gurgling along the bottom of the creek.

Esther, who lived much nearer to the earth than her father usually did, and whose gratitude on that account was inclined to be more practical, came along to Sam and, with a pretty gesture, half-serious, half-jesting, shook hands with him.

"And thank you, Sam," the beautiful girl said; "what ever we should do without you, God alone knows." The little Cockney blushed, and his eyes shone.

CHAPTER XI

A May Snow-storm

THE Trailey-Tressider-Potts convoy had scarcely climbed out of Eagle Creek and entered the rugged, wooded territory lying between the Eagle Hills and the North Saskatchewan River, when it ran into a violent snow-storm.

After flooding the prairie with dazzling splendour for so many days, the sun veiled itself in a dirty, yellowish murk. An all-pervading greyness masked the heavens. The wind veered to the north, and although blowing with no more strength than usual, it acquired a melancholy note as it sighed through the trees.

Only a few large snowflakes came down at first. Big, fluffy flakes they were, descending gracefully out of the lowering clouds and crashing on the grass, making easily as much noise as thistledown does when it lands. Then, gradually, the temperature dropped. The flakes lessened in size. Soon they began to whirl slantingly into the tree-tops. By evening, the storm had whipped itself into such a fury that it became a raging, howling gale of horizontally-flying ice particles.

The five Barr pilgrims put on extra clothing, yet they shivered beneath the canvas of the prairie

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schooners. Sheltered a little by the surrounding trees and hills, the top-heavy vehicles slithered down narrow but deep ravines, which every mile or so slashed the trail at right angles. They bumped over corduroyed muskegs, tottered across half-rotted log bridges, and skidded dangerously on side-hills—only the sharp snow-and-dirt tires which had been compressed on the wheels preventing them from slipping off the trail entirely, perhaps to overturn.

Above them the bare, slender branches of the aspens thrashed and rattled. Occasionally, a lone duck pierced the storm, tail to wind, speeding like a high-velocity shell. The horses' manes became matted with ice, and their coats steamed wet and glistening.

Hands grew numb till they were unable to feel the reins. English kid gloves were resorted to, but they quickly became sodden and useless. Sam drove one team, while Bert rode with the Traileys, to assist, so he said, with his knowledge and advice—on the well-known mathematical principle that twice nothing is something.

Chilled to the marrow, the travellers at last sighted through the storm the marquee for which they were making. They uttered little cries of thankfulness and returning good spirits. The rumour that one of these large tents was close at hand somewhere had encouraged them to try to reach such a welcome haven.

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For the use of the trekking Barr Colonists, government marquees had been erected at intervals of twenty miles or thereabouts. This one presented a cheerful sight, standing in a small clearing, with a smoking stovepipe swaying from its roof, and surrounded by a dozen covered wagons, all rapidly becoming enveloped in a mantle of snow.

That a paternal government should have taken the trouble to erect a few tents for the sake of the brave people, who, leaving behind them a world of comfort and luxury, were about to colonize a great, new, fertile territory; and this without anyone making a noise like a ballot box, or receiving a commission on the sale of the tents and stoves, seems almost incredible. The Barr Colonists were too new to everything to appreciate this wonderful bit of altruism at the time, though in later years they often talked about it, and regretted that they had not been sufficiently thoughtful to express their gratitude in some way or other.

The jaded horses were unhitched and fed half a thimbleful of oats each. Then they were tethered to trees with ropes—so that they might tangle themselves into immovable positions with the knotted, greasy, shrunken things. Not being intelligent, like their owners, the poor dumb beasts were soon hopelessly fettered. There was almost no pasturage hereabouts. Only a few tufts of dead herbage, mostly weeds, showed above the snow among the trees. The stack of hay, which in the early days of

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the trek had flanked each marquee, was in this particular instance entirely absent, having long since been used by those who had gone on before. Not only was this hay fed to the teams stopping at the marquees, but it was tied in great bundles and carried on the wagons for use at future halts. Feed or no feed, no Barr Colonist really felt safe unless his team was tied securely to his wagon. The prairie looked such a vast and empty place to be hunting lost horses in—and it was, too.

The snow-storm raged during two whole days. About a dozen families were staying at the marquee. The men took turns to cut wood for the stove, each one claiming the last turn. No farmhouse, east or west, ever had a cleaner woodyard than this marquee boasted, which is saying a good deal.

The cookstove was a bit of an enigma to the English women at first, but they eventually discovered which was the firebox end of it. Occasionally, when one of their number slipped out into the storm to gather a few sticks of wet drywood, while the men lay about discussing the future, and thinking, and occupying themselves with similar feats of endurance, the stove would grow quite warm.

"I think I shall quite get to like these ranges in time," observed a little, acid-faced woman, as she slyly moved a saucepan to the rear of the crowded stove, substituting therefore her own full frying-pan. "They hold so many things at a time, don't they, Mrs. Jaundiss?"

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Mrs. Jaundiss, a big, unhealthy-looking woman with a spotted face and blouse, said she thought the same, only with this difference—she squeezed a kettle over the flickering heat instead of a frying pan.

“‘Ow would yer like ter be the Sultan of Turkey, Bert, an’ ‘ave abaht a million wives gettin’ yer meals ready?” questioned Sam, nodding at the little group of women who stood round the stove.

Bert laughed and replied that one would suffice for him. Almost involuntarily he glanced at Esther, who was seated on a spread-out blanket with a pad on her knee, writing a letter. Although she was deeply immersed in the throes of composition, and therefore could not possibly have heard Bert’s remark, a faint blush stole over her lowered face.

The phlegmatic Trailey had never enjoyed himself so much since he had dozed through two consecutive three-day county cricket matches the previous summer. He slept continually.

Having thus fortified himself, and stored up a large reserve of energy, he ventured, late in the afternoon of the second day’s stay at the camp, to go out into the storm to cut a small sapling for the purpose of manufacturing two or three short pegs with which to fasten down the wall of the marquee. A draught was seriously interfering with his somnolence.

With great care he chose a nice, quiet-looking little tree about two inches thick, and decided, with

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admirable judgment, to sever its massive trunk at a point about two feet from the ground.

"Ah-h," he exhaled to himself, "this is the very tree."

Really it was, but, allowing his eyes to roam about, he caught a glimpse of another slender sapling, not quite so thick, which he bravely approached.

"This is better," he thought; "it is straighter."

He gripped the handle of the axe with which he had armed himself, and then turned his broad back to the wind so that the snow shouldn't blow into his eyes and spoil his aim. Next he lifted the weapon over his head, as though it weighed a couple of hundredweight, not swinging it too far back, because he found that his waistcoat began to tighten rather uncomfortably. His left foot was thrust forward in the most approved manner of woodsmen, and his teeth were set.

Down came the axe, but, catching a twig in its course, the blade was diverted somewhat. Instead of striking the tree and smashing the handle, as in the natural order of events should have been the case, he hit his foot.

Luckily, the axe was a new one, and, therefore, not over sharp. Also, a good deal of power had been taken out of the stroke by the twig, so Trailey only managed to cut through his boot, and half-sever his little toe.

Subsequently, Trailey was properly grateful for

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the axe's newness, but, at the moment, overlooking it, he launched a few descriptive words of a nature which he had never previously used, though, strangely enough, they seemed to come as natural to him as to the most fluent wood-cutter.

He promptly deserted the sapling, and the axe, and made his way limping and groaning to the marquee. Spots of crimson marked the snow behind him. All the occupants of the big tent who were awake, crowded round as soon as they learned what had happened. Much excellent advice was freely offered.

One tall chap, about fifty, with a pasty face and dark, smouldering eyes, said he had passed a St. John Ambulance examination when he was a lad at night school, and that the best thing to do was to get Trailey's boot off.

Another person, a red-haired woman with her black skirt all frayed at the bottom, and her whitish blouse a little out of her waist-band at the back, said that Dr. Burney of Manchester was the best doctor she had ever known for cases like that.

Mrs. Jaundiss demurred slightly. She said that Dr. Jones, who had attended her at her last confinement, was acknowledged by "all the women who'd ever 'ad 'im to be far the best doctor in hall England, say nothing of Manchester."

The red-haired woman thought not. She stoutly championed Dr. Burney. Equally loyal, Mrs. Jaundiss was very eloquent on behalf of the

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absent Dr. Jones. The argument rapidly reached the stage where they began to call each other "dear." With suppressed but quivering voices, eyes glittering, they were preparing verbally to lacerate each other, when two more women joined them.

In about five minutes, one subject of conversation blended with another until the discussion lapsed to a confidential murmur. In a designedly-careless tone, Mrs. Jaundiss stated rather nonchalantly that her "larst boy 'ad weighed nine an' three-quarter pound." The ladies seemed highly elated at this modest statement. Then commenced an enthusiastic comparison of the weights of several very remarkable babies. Fortunately for Mrs. Jaundiss, the red-haired woman happened to be childless—a fact which, of course, spurred the former lady to continue the topic. Only a very clever eavesdropper could have detected how earnestly concerned all the women were about William Trailey.

The unlucky victim of the accident was sitting on his camp-bed. Mrs. Trailey was bathing the injured foot. A big, oldish, broadly-built man, with flowing moustaches and an authoritative manner, most likely a superannuated policeman, had pushed everyone away, remarking officiously: "Give 'im hair, there! Give 'im hair!"

Meanwhile, Trailey was obviously thinking seriously of fainting, so Sam fetched a mug half-

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filled with whiskey from their wagon outside, and practically forced the reviver down the injured man's throat.

When Martha Trailey heard that it was a twig growing in a Canadian forest which had been the cause of the accident, she quite naturally conceived a violent dislike to the country.

"Now perhaps you'll admit what I've said all along is right," she went on, as she continued bathing her husband's foot. "Haven't I told you a thousand times that this wretched country is fit only for Red Indians?"

What with the shock, and the whiskey, which stole through his veins like essence of flames, William Trailey was feeling too light-headed to contradict his wife. His spirit was now in its natural element. Hand in hand with that of the renowned Johnnie Walker, it soared and soared aloft, skimming chimney-pots and mountain tops as it floated upwards.

Before taking final leave of the camp for a few hours, Trailey, with a slight return to consciousness, whispered to his wife: "You're nearly always right, m'dear," and then fell back on the bed.

This bit of generous praise from her husband, instead of being productive of affection, appeared rather to annoy Mrs. Trailey. Greatly ruffled, she retorted acrimoniously:

"Yes, and your very own mother told me not ten minutes after we got home from being married that

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you needed someone to look after you. 'Yes, Martha,' your mother said. I remember it as well as if it were only this afternoon. 'Yes,' she said, 'I know you'll look after my Willie much better than I've ever done.' Your mother didn't know very much, but she knew that. And you may thank your lucky stars I'm here, else you'd as like as not go and cut your head off. H'm! you can't chop trees down. Why, you can't even hang a picture. It's judgment on you. I'm convinced of it—for dragging us out here. And you never say your prayers now—or if you do you say 'em in bed. And we all know what that leads to, because I often do it myself. You're a wicked, drunken sinner. But you can't blame me for it, thank goodness. I've done my level best. Nobody can ever reproach me, and don't you ever say they can. I defy anyone——"

"E's all right nah, missis, if yer'll only stop preachin'. Oo's reproachin' yer? Not 'im. 'E's too kind an 'usband fer that. 'E couldn't 'elp cuttin' 'isself. None of us blokes can use an 'atchit yet, so 'ow d'yer think 'e can?" Sam was uttering these soothing remarks whilst assisting to make the patient more snug.

With nerves badly frayed, and wearing a truculent gleam in her eye, Mrs. Trailey faced Sam.

"Don't you criticize my husband. How dare you! I'll have you to know he's nothing to you, you—you——"

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"There, ma'am," interposed the little man smoothly; "I wouldn't use no bad langwidge if I was you. It's sinful, dam' me if it ain't, so yer mus'n't give w'y ter yer feelin's."

"Oh-h! you—you——" burst out the overwrought Mrs. Trailey.

"Here you are, mamma; here's some more bandage material for dad's foot. Mr. Tressider and I have just torn it out of one of my old aprons," and Esther passed to her mother a roll of clean linen. Bert stood by, quietly looking on.

"Mr. Tressider, eh?"—Mrs. Trailey's tone was very corrosive, but she accepted the bandage. "Of course, I forgot! It's always Mr. Tressider, isn't it? Mr. Tressider this, and Mr. Tressider that; it's never your mother who does anything, is it?"

"Mamma, dear, don't be silly. I think you are simply wonderful, the way you put up with things, and do everything for us, especially as you've never been used to this sort of life." Esther turned to Bert, partly to have another look at him, and partly to gain his support. "Don't you think so, Mr. Tressider?"

The look in her eyes would have made Bert say anything. Martha Trailey was applying the finishing touches to her sleeping husband's extempore bed, patting here, and gently pulling there, in a wifely effort to achieve the uttermost of comfort for him. When she heard Bert say: "Indeed she is,

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Es—Miss Trailey; she's really splendid," she kept her face averted. After assuring herself that her husband was resting comfortably, and when she had thrown an eiderdown across his feet, for the great, cheerless tent was damp and cold, she left him.

As her mother whirled industriously towards the stove to begin preparations for supper, Esther noticed that her eyes were sparkling with something that might have been tears.

CHAPTER XII

Tragi-Comedy in an Alkali Flat

THE TRAILEYS, with Sam and Bert, stayed at the marquee camp a week. At the end of that time, the snow had disappeared; also Trailey's foot was doing nicely. Nevertheless, that gentleman arranged for Bert to do his driving for him. To this no one objected, not even Esther.

Trails were now made doubly treacherous by the water from the melted snow. Every few miles one or other of the wagons sunk to its axles. Sometimes they wriggled from the grasping clutch of the sticky morass by doubling-up; but much oftener by unloading. And because of the strangeness of the tasks they were constantly faced with, and the weirdness of the methods they employed for their accomplishment, at least one-half their truly prodigious efforts was so much time and labour wasted.

About one day's travel, roughly speaking, from Battleford, they ran into a screamingly comic incident, one of the kind which anyone except an old-timer, familiar with the peculiarities of the Barr Colonists, may possibly pooh-pooh at, or quite likely regard as pure myth. It is no trick to wrench credulity in these sceptical times. Indeed, it seems the more people know, the less they believe.

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However, an alkali flat of immense length, and probably two or three hundred yards wide, was the pastoral setting chosen by an inscrutable Fate for the production of a pathetic little scene. To the right were the rounded hills marking the giant Saskatchewan's mile-wide meanderings towards Lake Winnipeg. On the left, the perfectly-level alkali plain strung itself out to the limit of vision. In front, more rounded and wooded hills; and, behind, a gently-rolling country disappearing into black perspective, with a ridge in the foreground upon which grew a long, straggling curtain of leafless poplars.

Only their axles, and boxes, had prevented the greyish, viscid, oozy alkali (in consistency a sort of cross between wet concrete and quicksand) from almost engulfing not only half a dozen colonists' wagons, but the oxen and horses as well.

The animals had plunged and struggled till they could do so no longer. As fast as one leg was withdrawn from the sticky stuff—with a plop like a huge cork shooting out of a bottle, deeper and yet deeper sank the other quivering limbs. Enervated as they were by hardships and neglect, yet the horses were sufficiently alive to throw themselves about in terror as they felt themselves being inexorably drawn downwards. Fortunately, their bellies, empty as most of these were, prevented them from being completely swallowed up.

Thinking to find firmer ground, each driver had

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steered his wagon into the great, wide flat (which, by the way, it was impossible to avoid)—striking out a course of his own, only to meet the same sort of disaster which had overtaken the others.

Before rushing into the prairie's shallow, saucer-like, gluey plain, where it waited patiently like a huge trap beneath a covering of waving, reedy grass, Sam and Bert first did some scouting. With infinite care, as they thought, they chose a beautifully-camouflaged, innocent-looking place to cross.

So firm did the ground appear, that in the heat of the sun it had begun to turn snow-white with the absolute purity of its behaviour. In a very few minutes, they discovered that it was trouble of the most acute kind, and lots of it, which was causing the alkali flat to turn white, like salt.

They both steered their teams from afoot, a method green Englishmen invariably choose. The Trailey family were also walking.

As soon as the wagons sunk down, which they quickly did, and before the horses were able to do much struggling, Sam and Bert promptly unhooked all the traces. Finding themselves at some liberty, the half-starved creatures at once began biting greedily at the heaven-sent pasturage, all the while cunningly lifting their feet—like a cat does on a wet floor—as these were sucked in by the insatiable ooze.

Fifty yards or so to their right, another wagon was sitting peacefully on its axles. A man and a

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woman and a young girl seemed to be conducting themselves rather queerly—even for Barr Colonists.

"There's somethink up wiv that party over there," remarked Sam the sympathetic, as he gazed curiously at the little group. "Lissen ter the kid sobbin'! She's fair broken-'earted."

Bert, too, was human enough to forget his own troubles for a short time when brought face to face with the minor tragedies of fellow-colonists. "Let's go and investigate, Sam," he said, at once commencing to walk across.

A thinnish, weedy man, wearing tweeds of shabby aspect, was standing alongside a hole in the alkali which he had evidently only recently dug. Plainly he was not by profession a navvy, nor a sexton, nor of any other occupation whose chief tool is the lowly spade.

The hole in the ground looked as if it had been excavated by a very incompetent fox terrier. Most of the gummy soil was sticking to the man's boots, with here and there a little adhering lovingly to his face and clothes. The rest clung fondly to the spade—mostly about the handle. Another thinnish person, a woman, enveloped in a waterproof coat of a light fawn colour, was seated close by in the long grass, which hereabouts was profuse—a godsend the party's rack-like, black-and-white-spotted oxen lunged strenuously forward from their bogged position to investigate.

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"Wot's up?" asked Sam of the little girl, who was convulsed with grief. The woman on the ground wiped a tear from her left eye, snuffled slightly, squeezed her handkerchief into a damp ball, put it in the pocket of her coat, then turned her face away, apparently to hide its misery.

"Fa—Fa—Fanny's d-dead," gulped the little maiden, who was perhaps about ten.

The man turned dreary eyes on Sam, who noticed, stretched out beside the freshly-scooped-out hole, stark and stiff in death, a young pig. The man wiped his perspiring brow with the sleeve of his coat and sighed.

"Yes, Fanny's gone," he echoed dismally; then, pulling his watch out and looking at it, he said: "Five o'clock when she left us—to the very minute," and his voice, a high-pitched, clear falsetto, went fluttering out into the void like a choir-boy soloist's tones dying away among the rafters of a lofty cathedral.

Catching the extreme solemnity of the occasion, Sam murmured:

"Pore Fanny."

Bert coughed sympathetically. Esther, who had also come across to see what was the matter, emitted a soft little sigh at Sam's words. She was a very tender-hearted girl, with the English-woman's love of animals.

"Wot killed it?" asked Sam, as he surveyed the

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fortunate pig, in the same glance instantly comprehending that "Fanny" was in reality a little boy porker.

"We do—on't kn—o—ow; o—h o-o-h," wailed the little girl.

"Stomach pains, I fancy," said the man in his sing-song voice.

A smothered blubber came from the woman on the grass, with whom, woman-like, Esther had been commiserating tenderly.

"Belly-ache," she vouched confidently between the emission of a couple of small-sized tear-drops, which just then trickled from her reddened eyes, grazed her chin, and fell splashing on her rain-coat. "I fed 'er reg'lar, an' all. In fact, she lived just like one of us."

A second, and closer, inspection revealed to Bert that the dead porker's ears were in a shocking state. They were mangled, and almost non-existent. Indicating them with the toe of his boot, he said: "What did that?"

"She used to play with Daisy a lot—in the box there," the man observed, and he nodded towards a little cage arrangement which was suspended to the back of the wagon by means of a length of rope. "Got a bit rough with one another at times," he added.

"Daisy's ears's the same," snuffled the woman on the ground.

Bert and Sam walked round to the cage to inspect

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Daisy, whilst Esther comforted the grieving females. Sure enough, the ears of the surviving piggy were chewed almost completely off.

"Started to eat one anuvver, my Gawd if they didn't!" Sam exclaimed. "Pore little bleeders!"—then, turning to the man, he said: "Buy 'em at Sarskatoon?"

"Yes—at a farm just this side. Five dollars each. And them three fowls there, a dollar apiece."

Slung from the rearmost hoop of the schooner-top, the sheet of which was removed, presumably to give free play to the relatively cooling breeze, for the day had been blisteringly hot, was a second cage. This held in close captivity three speckled farmyard birds.

"Plymouth Rocks," the man explained proudly as Sam and Bert stared up at them. What little could be seen of the birds seemed to indicate that they weren't very ancient—not above seven or eight, perhaps.

"Gettin' any eggs?" queried Sam, materialistic as usual.

"Not yet. My wife says they swing about too much. She says it makes 'em seasick. What d'you think yourself?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Bert, thoughtfully.

"But when we get to our land," went on the man, "I think they'll give us a few."

As though in protest, a couple of the fowls cocked their heads up, and, with bursting throats

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and wide-open beaks, proclaimed to their ingenuous owner their unimpeachable masculinity in a pair of the lustiest and most competitive cock-a-doodle-does that ever resounded across an astonished prairie.

"Does that uvver one do that?" Sam questioned suspiciously.

"No."

"You ain't alf lucky."

"Oh, why?"

"Them fowls wot just crowed is cocks—but the uvver's an 'en."

This piece of highly-informative news gradually seeped into the man's rather one-sided intelligence. He had been a draper's assistant back home in England—in Manchester, to be exact, where he had excelled in the manly art of selling calico, and corsets, and cotton stockings.

In those days—at any rate, it was so among the Barr Colonists—the very first thing a man did to his stock (even before feeding them) was to endow them with names. People with classical educations christened their animals Plato, Virgil, Psyche, and such like appellations. Those with biblical proclivities and training resorted to Pharaoh, Esau, Mordecai, and similar titles; whereas the common people fell back on Bill, and Sally, and Prince, and other every-day names.

Quite early in the game, Sam had remarked this trait. Was not their own team bearing up bravely

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under the burden of "Tempest" and "Kruger"? And weren't Trailey's nags nicknamed "Arthur" and "Freddie"? All round him—on the trail, in camp, at Saskatoon, had he not listened to vapid oxen being frantically inveigled with "Sissy," and "Carl," and "Seneca," and terribly frequently, also, with long-drawn-out strings of curses, which were fast dooming otherwise good-living young Englishmen to everlasting perdition? One colonist, an ex-schoolmaster and classical scholar, actually named his oxen "Aristophanes" and "Euripides." His explanation was that the former ox, possessing very long horns, was always hooking his mate, which, because of having no horns at all, was very docile.

"Wot's their nymes?" Sam asked of the man, nodding at the fowls.

The proud owner instantly waxed enthusiastic. "That one with only one toe on its right foot—you can't see it from here; well, that's called Phyllis, after my wife's sister. The other one, the one that doesn't crow, I've named Susie—to remind me of my first wife, the mother of my little girl there. That other beggar, the one with its eye pecked out, we call Amos, on account of my once having an uncle named Amos, who came home from the Indian Mutiny with only one eye. He was a canteen sergeant."

"Yes, it's very 'andy to 'ave only one eye in the harmy," observed Sam with the innocent manner

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of a conjurer about to produce three or four hundred yards of linoleum out of a silk hat.

"Oh, why?" demanded the ex-draper, biting hugely.

"Why, because," replied Sam, winking wickedly at Bert, "when a sodger wiv only one eye charges the henemy, it cuts the barsteds in 'alf."

Bert crumpled up in a sort of fit, as though he'd been smitten with sudden colic. "I never thought of that," laughed the other man.

"Very smart nymes you've gev them fowls," said Sam, whose face was as straight and as hypocritically solemn as an undertaker's at a dead rival's funeral.

"Yes, an' they all answer to 'em, too. You ought to see Amos there, when the wife calls to him an' says, 'Amos, you rascal, when are you going to lay us some eggs?' He just sticks his head on one side an' makes a noise in his throat like as if he was quietly chucklin' to himself. He's a knowing bird, that."

"Jus' like an 'uman bein'—eh?"

"Yes."

Sam was anxious to learn how an obvious town-dweller could be so well up in farmyard lore, so he said: "Where d'yer come from?"

"Manchester—but my wife's from Birmingham."

Sam adopted a slightly supercilious manner not at all uncommon with individuals of his class, who

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either openly or secretly, or both, despise all provincials.

Bermondsey, from its superior heights of cunningness, looked down scornfully upon poor little simple Manchester. "That there Amos cock'll be layin' eggs fer yore missis when Burning'am's a holiday resource," mocked Sam.

Bert grinned and strolled off to join Esther, who had apparently succeeded in diverting the woman's thoughts from the grief of an unexpected bereavement to more pleasant matters connected with their future life on the prairie, two hundred miles from anywhere.

"Yes, miss," the woman was saying, "my 'usband's goin' in for markit gard'ning. 'E loves stewed prunes, so 'e'll know all about clippin' branches off of roses, an' rodydendrums, an' things."

Esther smiled. She knew a little about pruning, herself. The Trailey's back garden wall in England had been draped with ivy, off which she often used to shave pieces in a worthy endeavour to persuade it to trail itself across an old-fashioned doorway.

"——And yer want ter feed that pig," Sam was advising the husband, who playfully commenced addressing a series of quaint, grunting noises to Daisy as she reclined disconsolate in the hindmost cage of the menagerie. "Nah it ain't got Fanny's ears ter chew at, it'll snuff it, as true as yore nyme's . . . Wot is yer nyme, if it ain't arskin' too much?"

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"Cox."

"Wot!"

"Cox. C-o-x, Cox."

For easily a whole minute Sam was struck completely dumb. That a man bearing such a name should be transporting two cocks and a hen to the distant Colony was too much even for sophisticated Sam.

"No wonder yer knows all abaht poultry," he said when he had recovered from the shock. Still wearing a look of astonishment, he added: "My nyme's Potts."

"Oh," said the ex-draper, "I have some cousins named Potts. Relations, perhaps," but observing that Sam's stature was at least a couple of inches less than his own, and that his features were far from classic, he said in a changed tone, from which all warmth had been carefully extracted, "it's likely to be very distant, though, if you are."

"I'm from the Big Smoke," returned Sam guilelessly. "Ain't got no relashuns up in the north, not as I knows of—leastw'ys, if I 'ave, they ain't farmers."

This rather subtle compliment pleased the Manchester man so much, that he called to his wife to ask where he might find a small crust of bannock with which to banquet the surviving pig, Daisy. "And you fetch that white stone from over there, Annie," he ordered his little girl, "an' we'll put it on Fanny's grave."

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Annie broke out in fresh paroxysms of woe, but she obeyed. Then the future market gardener, spitting into the palm of one of his hands in the most approved fashion of English navvies working by the hour, started industriously to inter the porcine corpse. With fitting respect, Sam, Bert and Esther quietly left the stricken family to its obsequies.

Though the sun was rather more than half-way down from the zenith, the heat was almost overpowering. All round them colonists toiled and sweated; some digging in front of the buried wagon-wheels; some hooking two and three teams together in a long string, trying to overcome the immobility of a half-emptied load, only to see-saw their horses or oxen into impossible knots; others laboriously transporting their stuff bit by bit on to hard ground, till their wagons were entirely unloaded.

The last-mentioned scheme was the one Sam and Bert decided to adopt. Systematically, they set about it, the ladies carrying the lighter articles, and the men the heavy goods. When the great gulf of the prairie night swallowed them up, with their heart-testing toil only partly done, they erected their tents and prepared a hasty supper over a cheery campfire; then, as the smouldering shadows wrestled more and more successfully with the fitful gleams from the dying embers, they retired to their roughly-improvised beds and almost instantly fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII

Battleford

THREE-QUARTERS of the following day was spent in extricating the wagons from the voracious alkali. Even after they had finished their own wearisome toil, and were all loaded up once more ready to proceed, they found it impossible not to go to the assistance of other colonists who were less fortunately situated than themselves. How could a lone man, no matter how willing, and possibly with no help but that which a nerve-exhausted and travel-satiated wife could give, struggle with a ton or so of heavy baggage across a bottomless ooze? A still more unanswerable question presented itself. How could such helplessness be ignored? Weren't they all penetrating deeper and deeper into the wilderness, where every vestige of help and encouragement must come from each other?

Unskilled, perhaps; innocent, maybe; foolish, possibly; but heroic without a shadow of a doubt, were these hundreds of men and women who plodded resolutely on to achieve a set purpose, with, in the territory where they were going, not even so much as a footprint in the grass as a suggestion of hope.

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Almost continuously the stream of colonists and freighters dribbled along and into the morass. There was no other way round. The highly-deceptive surface of the long, narrow plain refused even to support an empty wagon. Not until weeks later, when the hot sun had baked the ground to the hardness of stone, were any colonists able to pass that spot without leaving some mark or other, either on the whitening soil with a spade, or on their own spirits with the experience.

Compelled at last to disregard their fellow-unfortunates' claims for succour, the Trailey party continued their journey. Another day's ups and downs brought them to a substantial steel bridge, spanning the Battle River. Crossing this, they climbed into historic Battleford.

Old capital of the North-West Territories; Headquarters of C Division of the North-West Mounted Police; Hudson's Bay Company post; Indian and half-breed centre, Battleford occupied a magnificent site high up on a plateau at the extreme tip of the acute angle formed by the confluence of the mighty North Saskatchewan and the much smaller, though swift-flowing, Battle River.

Such a position for a town should bring warmth to the heart of a military commander. Whether it has ever done so or not is questionable; anyhow, it most surely did to the hearts of the travel-stained Barr Colonists in the spring of nineteen hundred and three.

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Here was their final contact with civilization, and their last opportunity for purchasing stores and other supplies. Here, for them, was the last outpost of the omnipotent and revered god Mammon, who is accustomed to hang out his sign in gold mines, oil wells, ammunition factories, occasionally in pawn-shops, but for preference in places called banks. Here was their ultimate chance to post a letter, send a telegram, buy a drink (legally, of course), or call a policeman.

On a much smaller scale, a tented camp similar to the one which was fast melting away at Saskatoon dotted the sandy plain contiguous to the little town. Considerable business of buying and selling was done. Banking accounts were opened with a surprising minimum of fuss. The Bank of British North America at this point made no inquiries about anyone's antecedents, though had they done so, such questions would have been easily answered satisfactorily, for plenty of the Barrites boasted pedigrees as long as your arm, some of them vanishing dubiously into mists of aristocratic illegitimacy.

A great deal of wealth melted away rapidly. Newly-acquired cheque books accelerated the spending orgy. Whatever else the Barr Colonists may be accused of, they can never be charged with parsimony. Many Western fortunes grew suddenly vigorous, their tap-roots absorbing sustenance from the open-handed spending of the colonists.

Sam and Bert borrowed an old buckboard from

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a Battleford resident in which to transport the limping Trailey to the bank. Sam himself disdained to patronize the institution.

"Wot's the good?" he remarked to Bert. "'Ere's my few quid," and he patted, somewhat affectionately—for he valued money, though a Londoner—a leather pocket on a broad, red-and-white-striped belt which encircled his waist.

The other two men were differently placed. Although possessing but a tithe of Sam's adaptability and energy, they were men of wealth compared with him. But the little Cockney was not the slightest bit envious. A sort of unwritten understanding existed between him and Bert, whereby the latter paid for the equipment, and the incidentals of the trek, in return for which Sam gave freely of his advice, labour and company—an arrangement so simple, that it not only overcame the disparity of riches, but proved advantageous in numerous other ways.

They rested at Battleford three days, during which time they were agreeably impressed with the little town's picturesqueness. The genuineness of the inhabitants was very noticeable. The come-into-my-web, God-bless-you-brother look of the hang-you-I'm-all-right, scheming salesman was here practically not to be found. The change was very welcome.

That indefinable something which makes the real old-time Western spirit such an admirable trait of

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character, was in the Battleford country seen at its very best. The total indifference to pretence; the unbounded, unabated hospitality; the almost complete absence of the sinking of individuality in the pursuit of wealth; the unrehearsed naturalness of the people's generosity—(not offers of it)—were all qualities which delighted the more observant of the colonists, who had but recently sailed away from an environment where the Golden Rule is admired—like a king's coronation—for the rareness of its performance.

Trailey and Bert spent money lavishly. They stocked up with every imaginable thing, regardless of transportation problems. With an astonishing display of diplomacy in one so young, Bert presented Mrs. Trailey with a pair of weighty, handsome, vividly-scarlet Hudson's Bay blankets.

"Oh, you shouldn't, Mr. Tressider," the good lady remonstrated. "A pretty penny they've cost, I'll be bound. They'll come in useful, though, if we get any more snowstorms," and she fingered their soft, fleecy surface admiringly. "Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed, as she lifted the blankets up, "what a weight they are! My husband will never stop sleeping when he gets these over him."

William Trailey happened to be dozing in a folding camp-chair just outside the tent, in which position he was soaking up sunshine like an equatorial lizard on a rock. Every now and then he emitted a subdued grunt of perfect content.

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Esther was learning how to darn a woollen sweater, with her mother as an acrimonious tutor.

"Dad doesn't need anything to induce him to sleep," she laughed.

"Sleep! H'm!" snorted her mother. "Your father doesn't sleep; he goes into trances. Look at him—he's in one now. It's my opinion this isn't a country for lazy people. We're rushing into trouble," she continued reflectively, as she pursued her train of thought. She was busy peeling some potatoes which that morning she had attempted to refuse at the hands of a generous matron of the town. "I can feel it in my bones. Poverty, and worse, is staring us in the face all the time. Besides, I dropped my mirror this morning, and broke it; and that's a sure sign of trouble. One of your grandma's pictures fell off the wall the night your Uncle Tom was born. You remember him, Esther, don't you? He was the one who turned out to be a journalist, y'know, and tried to write poetry. I've heard your grandma say many a time it was a wonder she herself wasn't taken. The midwife . . ."

"In which event," interposed Esther quickly, "you wouldn't have been here to tell us about it, mamma."

Esther's face became suffused with blushes at the turn her mother's remarks were taking. Bert was quite composed. He thought she had never looked so adorable. "She's mine, or my name's

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not Tressider," he vowed to himself as he watched the flush slowly fade from his companion's lovely, rose-petal skin. "What a magnificent girl!" he mused, his mind wandering back among the romantic incidents of the trek, dwelling with leisurely joy upon the charming intimacies with which such a life abounds. But, like a lot more bliss, he merely longed for what he already possessed. It was merely a matter of revelation.

A trifle reluctantly, they finally set off from Battleford. The trail was sandy and good, well-worn by the vehicles of wandering Indians, who went frequently into the little town from their reservations close by. Here and there long wagons had drawn faint lines in the pale, yellow grass, tracing the path of a more or less aimless endeavour in some dusky Indian's untroubled mind. Beautifully natural tufts of poplar grew everywhere. A gigantic arch of sky rested its pale-green rims on the rounded buttresses of the Battle and Saskatchewan River hills to right and left. Far away in front, the prairie, stained a deep blue-black with distance, and futurity, stretched illimitably, waiting with implacable patience for the arrival of the unsuspecting Barr Colonists.

Soon a smoke, like a thin haze, enveloped everything, seeping into the crystal atmosphere apparently from nowhere at all. As the party travelled on hour after hour, it grew thicker and thicker. It flowed in over the prairie as impercep-

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tibly as did the sentiment of affection over Esther and Bert. This latter emotional phenomenon was fast becoming so dense that at times the victims of it were perfectly unable to detect anything but the light shining from each other's eyes. Without an inkling of the nearness of any special declaration; scarcely aware that the vague, pleasant fondness they had conceived for one another was but the enchanting prelude to something more serious, and therefore more risky, the pair of lovers penetrated deeper and deeper into the spiritual haze of a mutual attachment.

CHAPTER XIV

Prairie Fires

THE SECOND evening after leaving Battleford, the party camped inside a huge but distant arc of fire. All day the sun had been almost hidden by smoke, though the fire itself was not visible. A hot, dry wind from the south-west, which had licked up all moisture except sloughs and running creeks, rushed across their front like a gust from a furnace.

In the abstract they knew a little about prairie fires, as they did about horses, and organic chemistry, and Confucianism, and other popular topics. They knew, in a casual sort of way, that the long, dry grass was as inflammable as chips soaked in kerosene. Round their own campfires they had observed that tiny spots of burning grass had a queer getting-away quality. Somehow the knowledge had bitten into their unfamiliar intelligence that, on a perfectly calm day, a little patch of fire possessed the power of raising its own breeze.

"That's the surrounding air rushing in to fill the vacuum," Bert explained one day, as he watched Sam trying to beat out an embryonic prairie fire.

"That's wot you calls it, eh?" puffed Sam, who though entirely ignorant of physics, was energeti-

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cally flapping at a widening ring of fire with the back of a shovel.

Bert picked up a bit of burning grass and calmly lighted a cigarette. "Yes," he said, "that's the theory of it."

Sam didn't seem to be particularly impressed. For a minute or two he leaned on his shovel like a professional road-mender, partly with the idea of catching his wind, but chiefly to permit him to utter something sarcastic. Meanwhile, the blaze was romping away like a train of gunpowder alight.

"An' wot's the proper way of explainin' a feller watchin' anuvver silly fool puttin' it aht?"

"Why, pure unadulterated ignorance, Sam, me lad," laughed Bert, who, taking the hint, at once commenced to singe a perfectly good pair of boots in an attempt to trample out some of the fire.

Trailey regarded the circumstance with his usual detached air of innocent unconcern. He apparently thought that some new-fangled, pyrotechnic display was being put on for his special amusement.

"Fancy it burning!" he ejaculated wonderingly. "I never knew grass would burn like that. It doesn't in England."

Trailey's constant journeyings through his own private wonderland were a source of much pleasure to him. His delightfully naive remarks amused everyone—except his wife, Martha, who flung showers of scorn at him, only to see it splash off his

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incorrigible dreaminess and drain away uselessly. He appeared to be everlastingly surprised that the country wasn't filled with buildings, and 'buses, and other products of a comfortable civilization.

Westwards from Battleford, the prairie resembled a vast virgin park. Judged as a whole, it was flat; but, upon closer examination, it turned out to be quite rolling. Ridges alternated with dips. Occasionally hogbacks grew into real hills, seamed with valleys and ravines. Nature's works were all well rounded and smooth. There were no jagged outcroppings, no splintered rocks, nor anything at all that suggested abruptness or impetuosity. Even the angles and corners of gullies had been planed off by Time and coated with grass. Obviously, much patience had gone into the making of this part of the earth; which is the reason, perhaps, why a good deal of the same attribute is needed in getting anything out of it. A few Barr Colonists comprehended this the first month—but not many did.

Patches of poplar and willow, bare of leaves, smudged the tawny landscape in every direction. Shallow swamps, filled with tangled yellow grass, which when alive had been three and four feet high, were in some areas almost as numerous as the bluffs. Pea vines, vetches, rose and wild fruit trees, native grasses of many kinds—all encircled the clumps of timber in masses of luxuriant vegetation, at this time of the year dead and dry as a cinder.

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Within the bluffs, the trees were thickly interspersed with old undergrowth, some of it half-consumed relics of previous conflagrations. The whole land was one vast tinder box, with a wind, like an ever-ready bellows, waiting to fan into fury any little blaze started by some idiot with a match. There were no graded roads, nor railways; no ploughed land, no mowing machines, no grazing cattle, nor anything at all to contribute one jot of prevention to the spreading of black desolation when once a fire was whisked out of man's control. Two or three years' growth of grass covered the earth. It actually made walking difficult, so thick was the matted mass. Into this potential fire-trap went hundreds of innocent people, all of whom were utterly unused to a climate whose drying, parching wind was twin brother to the fire fiend itself.

Prior to the air becoming smoke-logged, the Trailey party had observed, rolling up into the sky in the distance, great columns of smoke, which stretched out and spread to the horizon with startling rapidity. At night, the scene had been one of grandeur. With the wind in such a direction as to carry the smoke away from them, they saw, twenty and thirty miles off, the fringe of fire leaping and licking its way along. Devouring tongues of yellow flame shot up like miniature volcanic eruptions as the masses of fuel-laden brush timber were consumed.

By the first week in May, the whole tremendous,

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V-shaped territory, situated between the two rivers westwards, was ablaze for hundreds of miles. Even in the open spaces, where the growth was relatively thin and short, the flames, fanned by powerful air currents, were three to six feet high. But in the ravines, and bluffs, and hollows, the enormous amount of combustible material sent them shooting up to a height of thirty and forty feet.

Though awe-inspiring, the sight was grand. The members of the Trailey party, from a sight-seeing standpoint at first, afterwards as possible sufferers—were extremely interested in the spectacle.

"My word," Trailey commented to his wife, "it beats the fireworks at the Crystal Palace. What a remarkable country this is!"

Mrs. Trailey's sensitized organs had long since become aware of something burning. She had repeatedly stuck her small, thin nose into the air and sniffed. "Something's certainly on fire, somewhere," she said. "It can't be anybody's chimney—not out here, can it?"

"Oh, no, my dear," replied Trailey; "the police would see to that. They wouldn't let people set fire to their chimneys without coming down on them severely. The Canadian police are very efficient. Don't you remember Egerton R. Young, the missionary, telling us so in his lectures at chapel?"

"What! that man who dressed up like a Red

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Indian, and told us all about Canada, and then sold us a book, or something? H'm!"

"Yes; we bought one from him. "By Snow-train and Dogshoe" it was called, I think. Where is it, Martha? Find it, my dear. I should like to read it again. It was very interesting, and told you all about ice, and snow, and things like that. It might be useful to us with all this fire about."

"You never mind Everton R. Flung, or whatever his name is. I gave his book away; I'm sure I did. Let me see—— Oh, yes! I made Lucy Flatt a present of it. She wanted something for a prize for her Sunday-school class, and she wasn't quite sure whether to get a copy of 'Josephus,' I think she called it; or whether to get 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' with gilt edges; so I gave her this Kingston B. Strong's book about Indians that you keep worrying me about. She said it was just what she was looking for, only she couldn't remember the title—the cat, her. I know if I were a Sunday-school teacher I shouldn't tell such horrible fibs. She only mentioned it because she knew I should give it to her—and so save her a paltry half-crown. It's disgusting, and her with a young man like she's got. He's a lot too good for her. I nearly told her so; but thank goodness I didn't. She'd only have told him, and then they'd have talked us over if you like. She's two-faced enough. I hate people who are everlastingly picking others to pieces. If

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I were Lucy Flatt's young man—and thank goodness I'm not—I'd enlist for a soldier, and go off to India, or Ireland, or somewhere, and break her heart. What ever he can see in her, I don't know. She isn't even pretty, let alone being a Christian. And talk about a temper! And her tongue! If that poor young fellow can put up with her, well, he's an angel, that's all. And fancy you wanting me to find his book! If you want to read about fires, read your Bible, and see what happens to . . . H'm!"

William Trailey had made a noise in his throat. He had snored. Nearly every living creature possesses some sort of protective device. This was his. They sat, not uncomfortably, atop of the loaded wagon, towards the back, beneath the schooner-top. Forward, silhouetted in the semi-circular opening, two figures leaned against each other like the sides of a triangle. They were Esther and Bert, the latter driving. Only six feet separated them from Mr. and Mrs. Trailey, yet the two couples were worlds apart. The other wagon, with Sam in charge, was ahead slightly.

Although thinking of something entirely different, Esther and Bert were discussing fires. The low rumble of the wagon did not interfere with their conversation, which was very spasmodic. The pungent smell of smoke troubled them little.

"What a terrible thing fire is," Esther said,

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withdrawing her gaze from the sun, which, like a great bloodshot eye, peered through the thickening haze from straight before them. Bert, too, had been looking at the fiery orb. In his own mind he had compared it with a solicitor's red wafer seal, clinging to an old yellow parchment.

"Our friend up there is a big fire," he said, glancing at the sun. "He'd be something of a catastrophe if he were closer, I suppose. The people in Arabia think so, no doubt."

"What about the people in Alaska?" laughed Esther, but Bert did not reply. Martha Trailey was knitting. Her husband was asleep, and, from the look on his face, unquestionably he was as happy as only oblivion can make anyone.

None of them noticed that the wind had changed its direction. The air was laden with floating particles of ash. The smoke grew suddenly thicker, completely veiling the sun. All through the day the wind had been driving the distant fires obliquely across their line of travel. Now it was coming at them head on.

Cautious Sam brought his team to a halt. A much more experienced man than he was could not have judged how far away the fire was, nor of its extent. He jumped down from his wagon to consult with Bert.

"Wot abaht it?"

"It's looking pretty thick. Wind's rising, too."

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What d'you suggest, Sam?" A faint roar could distinctly be heard coming down the wind. Every minute the smoke grew more opaque.

"'Ow would it be ter do some of this 'ere back-firin' they told us abaht at Battleford?"

"All right," replied Bert. "You know how the dodge works, I suppose?"

"Why, set fire ter the blinkin' grarss—over there, s'y; an' then move on to it when it's burnt." Sam waved his arm towards a bit of open prairie.

Old-timers at Battleford had warned them to be particularly careful about the smoke from prairie fires—not to get asphyxiated into unconsciousness, and then probably burned to death.

Where they were halting was a fairly favourable position—yet it wasn't. They were in the slough and brush country thirty or so miles west of Battleford. There were any number of tree-fringed water holes to walk into for protection from the fire. But sloughs meant grass, and much of it; and a heavy growth of grass meant large volumes of smoke, against which water was of no avail.

Sam had been doing some thinking. So had Bert, as far as that goes. His thoughts, though, were flitting about like butterflies, and, apart from love matters, were of no particular consequence.

"It won't be necessary ter backfire," Sam said, a new note in his voice. "Look at that!"

Flying embers floated through the smoky pall, which was now almost choking in its denseness.

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Hot gusts blew in their faces. A fearful crackling sound, mingled with a sullen roaring, beat down the wind to them in terrifying waves. Sam pointed at a glowing fragment of stick which had settled in the long, twisted grass a few yards distant.

After hesitating a moment, the ember flared up into a blaze, which crept hungrily into the surrounding grass. Slowly it devoured its way along, then suddenly one of the powerful gusts of wind which are so characteristic of the Western plains caught the fire and whipped it away as fast as a man could walk.

"Gawd!" muttered Sam, open-eyed. Other specks of flame were falling all about. Some merely spluttered and died out. All at once the wind howled like a fury, as it always does near a prairie fire. The smoke was suffocating.

"Foller me!" yelled Sam, refusing to be fascinated any longer. "There's the fire!" He pointed through the choking air. A dull, red glow lit up the huge columns of smoke.

Sam sprang aboard his wagon, grasped the lines, and then commenced frantically to inject some of his own excitement into his horses. Bert did likewise, feeling doubly heroic because of Esther's presence. The women were terrified, but far from panic-stricken. Sam had wheeled for a big, flat slough, which a little way back the trail had skirted. Headlong into it splashed the horses, dragging at

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the heavy load frenziedly, urged to their last gasp by their little driver. Bert followed. Crashing through a fringe of water-willows at a trot, Arthur and Freddie for once waived their right to get stuck, and actually strained and tugged till they were fairly in the centre of the slough, by the side of Tempest and Kruger.

"Jump into the water, Esther," cried Bert, repeating the order to the others inside. The jolting had wakened Trailey. He coughed a good deal, having been sleeping with his mouth wide open. Wonderment at the sudden and dramatic twist of events occupied his sluggish mind. Mrs. Trailey was moderately silent. A few "Mercy me's," soon taught her that it would be safer to keep her mouth shut tightly against the smoke.

"Thank God!" gasped Trailey fervently, as he clambered down from the wagon and dropped into the cool, thigh-deep water. His exertions had compelled him to inhale large draughts of furnace-like air and smoke. The ladies were already standing in the slough, trembling and terrified.

"Quick, Esther!—Mrs. Trailey!" Bert cried excitedly, as the advancing wall of fire bore down on them with frightful speed. "Duck into the water!" he yelled; then, climbing into the wagon, he dragged the tent—which was always kept handy for Trailey to recline on—into the slough, soaked it hastily, and flung it without ceremony completely over the cowering females.

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A pair of luxurious scarlet blankets fell off the load with the tent, so Bert soaked these also, and threw them over Trailey.

"What about yourself?" called Esther anxiously—"and Sam?"

"Don't worry about us, Esther. Stoop right down into the water, all of you," commanded Bert. Sam had already pulled the other tent off his own load, and soaked it for him and Bert to crawl beneath.

The fire, propelled by a fierce wind, and fanned into a lurid furnace by its own draught, roared and crackled all around them. The slough split the blaze in two. The horses snorted and tugged to get free; then stood still, shivering with fear. Sam made one or two brave attempts to splash them with water, but in vain. He was forced to retreat. Almost suffocated, he cringed again beneath the tent.

The slough was oval-shaped, and was probably two or three acres in extent. Raging like ten thousand demons, the main fire devoured its edges, licking everything up in its path, living vegetation and dead alike. Tongues of crimson flame swept over the water, and columns of spark-laden smoke rose high into the air. Impatient of the slough's obstruction, glowing embers leaped the water and fell into the grass beyond, continuing their consuming paths ahead of the main fire.

Esther and her mother huddled together, struck speechless with the suddenness of the catastrophe.

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However, within twenty minutes, the danger had passed. Although patches of timber and thick undergrowth still burned and smoked furiously all around them, the prairie grass was swept clear.

"By Jove, Sam! sloughs are useful things, after all," remarked Bert when they poked their heads from under the tent's enveloping folds.

"Not 'alf, they ain't," replied Sam, inhaling a deep, smoky breath.

In a flat, toneless voice, Trailey stuck his head forth, and said: "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform," and then he, too, drew in a large mouthful of very welcome air. He seemed pleased to be alive, which, no doubt, accounted for the wonderful relevancy of his quotation.

Lifting the blankets off his shoulders, he calmly surveyed the smoking landscape. "Ah-h-h," he sighed, "wonderful!—wonderful!"

Bert withdrew the tent from the half-smothered ladies. "All's well!" he cried joyously. "The fire's passed over, and I don't think we've suffered any damage in the least—beyond a few holes burned in these blankets, perhaps; and one or two in the wagon-covers." He was examining the tents, and the blankets, and the schooner-tops, appraising the damage. Sam was at the horses' heads, comforting the faithful brutes with pats and caresses, and queer expressions of fondness and appreciation, like men do when no one is listening.

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When Martha Trailey saw that the dripping blankets had been instrumental in saving her husband from the fire and smoke, she was greatly moved. "Oh, Mr. Tressider!" she exclaimed with (for her) deep emotion. "What a godsend! They've saved my husband's life," and she regarded first Bert, and then the saturated and somewhat soiled blankets gratefully.

William Trailey cast his eyes upwards into the smoke with a vacuously pious gesture. "His work, my dear," he murmured abstractedly. "You must never part with them."

"Part with them! Not for worlds! How dare you suggest such a thing?" Martha bent down to inspect the blankets more closely. With shining eyes and tender fingers she examined three or four tiny, brown holes which had been burned in them by drifting sparks.

Bert was secretly elated. He alone really knew why he had presented the blankets to Mrs. Trailey; although intuition might have whispered the reason to Esther.

Sam was unhooking a team preparatory to doubling-up on the other wagon. "When you've all done prayin' we may as well get aht of 'ere," he broke in irreverently; then, looking at the depressing scene about him, he added: "There's a lot of things ter be done yet. Wot a stinkin', smoky, black-lookin' ash-'eap! By gum, if it ain't!"

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Bert saw that the ladies were experiencing some difficulty in releasing themselves from the slough's muddy bottom, so he told Sam to wait a minute while he rendered them some assistance.

"You hang on to Mrs. Trailey's arm," he said to the good lady's husband, who was still surveying with a sort of childish curiosity the smoking world around him—"and you take my arm—Esther."

Esther obeyed. She stole a shy glance at Bert's face upon hearing him call her by her christian name. Something in her look made him grasp her hand, which he passionately squeezed thirty or forty times during their progress shorewards. Esther reciprocated, just sufficiently modestly to convey exactly the right message. Bert's heart pounded and jumped till he became quite dizzy with the intensity of his joy.

For a girl of Esther's calibre to return the pressure of his hand, especially when accompanied by such an eloquent avowal as that written in her lovely eyes, showed plainly enough where her affections lay. If actions speak louder than words, then Bert's silent proposal was answered by a joyous shout of consent. He was radiantly happy, almost to the extent that Esther herself was.

In the exuberance of his joy, he bubbled over to Sam as they extricated the wagons from the slough: "Congratulate me, you ugly little devil!"

"Wot for?"

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"I'm engaged. It amounts to that, anyway. Esther loves me, Sam."

Sam slipped a trace off a whiffletree, then turned round to have a good look at his companion.

"Rushin' things, aren't yer?"

"We've cared for one another all along. I suppose the excitement helped things a bit. But isn't she a wonderful girl, Sam?"

"The blinkin' world's full of wonderful gels. Leastw'ys, London is."

"That's what I used to think. But I know different now. Esther's queen of 'em all. And thank God for prairie fires! that's all I've got to say."

"Gawd's bein' thanked fer a lot of things jus' nah, ain't 'e?—sloughs, an' blankits, an' nah prairie fires. Wot's 'e got ter do wiv it all? Ooo d'yer reckon ter thank when yer gets things like a broken neck, or a missis wot runs away wiv anuvver bloke, or——"

"Oh, shut up! you're nothing but a wet blanket yourself—and a cold-blooded heathen to boot. Haven't you ever had any religious training?"

"No."

"Or attended church, and listened to clever sermons, and all that sort of thing?"

"No, never. My guv'ner always told me ter be careful ter do to uvvers wot they did ter me——"

"What you'd *like* them to do to you, I suppose you mean?"

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"All right; 'ave it yer own way. It all comes ter the same thing. But 'e was only a blinkin' cab driver, so 'e couldn't know anythink abaht religion. I'm glad you've got that gel of Trailey's, though; she's a good un."

CHAPTER XV

Black Desolation

THERE were only four colours in Nature the next morning—an azure sky, a few banks of fleecy white cloud, some unburned patches of fawn-coloured grass, and a dead, black earth.

"The world's in mourning; let's hope it isn't for us," observed Mrs. Trailey to her husband as she viewed the funereal landscape from her tent door.

The transformation had left Trailey a little bewildered. He hated such rapid changes. From the wagon-pole, where he sat combing his whiskers and trimming his finger-nails, he looked round him as calmly as any surprised man can look.

"My dear," he said, "it's wonderful."

Mrs. Trailey breathed disgust. "It gets on my nerves," she grumbled. "The other day the earth was white; yesterday it was yellow; and now it's black."

"It will be green next, mamma," interposed a voice from inside the tent, adding, with marvellous logic: "You remember what a heavenly green the country was on the way to Liverpool, don't you?"

"Remember! How can I ever forget it? Wasn't I born and reared there? How you can

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ask such silly questions, I don't know. Gypsies and Hottentots would be more suitable for this country, I'm thinking"—this with a contemptuous glance at the surrounding waste. "They wouldn't show the dirt—like Sam says his shirt doesn't; but I notice that's getting greasy-looking round the neck. Not that he doesn't do plenty to make it so. He's a good, honest worker, that little fellow is. Does everything before you can speak. William! William! Fetch me a bucket of water from the slough. And mind you don't fall in."

Sighing deeply, William obeyed.

"Don't you think Mr. Tressider is a nice young man, too, mamma?" cooed the voice from within the tent insinuatingly.

"Yes, I've nothing particular to say against him. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, of course; but he can't help that, poor fellow. This country isn't for that kind, I'm——"

"But, mamma; don't you think Bert will get on?"

"Mr. Tressider may get on, if that's who you mean—especially if he is lucky enough not to marry a brazen hussy like most of the young women are nowadays." Mrs. Trailey paused, then continued: "And how long have *you* been Berting it, I'd like to know?"

Esther emerged from the tent and crept up quietly behind her mother, who was now stooping over a pailful of dirty dishes, and embraced her with

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rather an excessive display of emotion. As she stood up, the lines in Mrs. Trailey's face softened somewhat.

"There, that'll do. I know how you feel. He's all right; though I did think at first he was one of those educated know-nothings like your father says the Tories are always putting into Parliament. But I've changed my mind. The way he acted yesterday raised him in my estimation a lot. He'll be as good a man as Sam some day, perhaps—if he keeps off the drink."

"Mamma, he'll never drink again if I ask him not to."

"Ask him, then. And be sharp about it. But it's precious little you know about men's promises, young lady. Pie crusts, every one of them. Look at your father. Who'd ever have dreamt that he'd become a drunkard? A life-long abstainer, nearly. Why, he used to fly into awful tempers just after we were married, all because James Tipplin, the millionaire brewer, presented our chapel with a stained-glass window. There was a fearful to-do about it; and your father——"

"But, mamma, darling; Bertie cares for me sufficiently to keep all his promises. He says so."

"——And your father left our chapel and went over to the High Street Primitives; but, when he found that one of their trustees had a cousin who kept a grocer's shop with an outdoor beer license, he returned to the old place. Your father used to be

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dead against the drink traffic. He was the one they tried to persuade to warn the ministers not to preach temperance when Jimmy Tipplin was in his pew. But your father refused. They said they'd picked him because he was so full of tact. Tact! your father! H'm! What funny judges of men other men are. It takes a woman to read a man—a married woman, that is. Why, your father would have sold the Distillery shares his Uncle Toby left him if it hadn't been for me." Martha Trailey once more contemplated the scene around her. After ruminating for a little while, she went on: "But we've got them yet, thank goodness!—and when I look round at this great big wilderness, the colour of soot, and wonder what's going to become of us all, it's a blessing we have."

Mrs. Trailey's remarks here came to an end. Her spouse had toiled wearily into camp with a heavy bucket one-third filled with water containing some very interesting zoological specimens. Most of the Western fauna and flora, barring buffalo and pine trees, appeared to be represented therein. If there is any truth in the theory that man is distantly related to the lower forms of life, then the Barr Colonists must have swallowed a good many of their uncles and aunts whilst trekking from Saskatoon.

William Trailey set the pail down with such an enthusiastic thud of relief that some of the aquatic

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life slapped over on to his wife's hand, just as she was picking up a saucer out of the other pail to dry it.

Trailey wiped the accumulated sweat off his unwrinkled brow with his handkerchief and stammered a brief apology.

"Oh-h-h-h! Take it off! Take it off!" screamed Mrs. Trailey, as something resembling a miniature alligator fastened itself on the back of her hand. She was the sort of woman who found it very difficult not to become hysterical when she felt anything crawling on her flesh. If human beings are blood brothers to the worm, why does this abhorrence persist?

Esther, with marvellous presence of mind, pulled her skirts tightly round her legs and commenced to echo her mother's "Oh's." This display of filial affection and sympathy proved so soothing to Martha Trailey that she immediately stopped shrieking and merely continued to moan that she was being eaten alive. "Oh, take it away, somebody! I'm blood-poisoned! My arm's swelling as big as a tree already; I can feel it."

"My own darling mamma," sobbed Esther, throwing her arms round her mother's neck. "Oh, if Bertie were only here."

But Bertie wasn't there to slay the dragon. Romance missed fire for once. The redoubtable Bert, accompanied by Sam, was at that particular moment engaged in the much less spectacular task

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of washing his feet in an adjacent slough. William Trailey was there, though. Very fortunately, that modern knight had by now regained some of the strength he had lost through the exertion of carrying the heavy pail of water to the camp.

Although, as a boy, Trailey had been exceedingly ambitious to become either a mighty hunter of big game, or a butcher, he had never voluntarily killed anything in his life. Hating death with his whole soul—in spite of the fact that a certain measure of business success in former days had been based on his rather harrowing suggestions of an early demise for the non-insured—he felt that something drastic must be done in the present instance, and that soon.

Martha Trailey was still shuddering and holding at arm's length that portion of her hand which she imagined was not yet eaten.

"Hold still, my dear," counselled her courageous husband, who, by means of a piece of thin stick, was vainly trying to dislodge the clinging slug. Then a brilliant idea flashed into his brain. With the palm of his hand he would crush flat the venomous creature.

"Keep perfectly still, Martha," he exhorted, and, before she could utter another wail, he smote his wife's hand with such vigour as pretty nearly to break the good lady's wrist.

Martha Trailey was just about to fall back swooning into her daughter's arms when she received this terrific smite; but the shock brought

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her very much to life again. Almost at once, she comprehended that it was her husband who was trying to do away with her hand, and not the slug. As quickly as light, she transferred her dislike from the miniature crocodile, now thoroughly squashed, to her heroic saviour.

"You cowardly beast! striking a poor, helpless woman like that! Aren't you satisfied with having ruined our home without being a low wife-beater as well? I'd be downright ashamed of myself if I were you. But, there"—abruptly changing her tone to one of commiseration—"perhaps it's not your fault. Your father was just the same. Mrs. Spreditt told me many a time that he used to treat your poor mother something shameful. She lived next door to them for years. She said it was through them quarrelling so much that her own husband spent so much time at the public-house. To think what your mother must have gone through! Poor woman! No wonder she died before her time"—William Trailey's mother had been carried off prematurely, aged seventy-seven—"But I shan't—not to please you; let me tell you that, William Trailey. And, heredity or no heredity, you're not going to bully me——"

"Mamma——" Esther commenced to remonstrate.

"——I've put up with it long enough," rattled on Mrs. Trailey, her anger fanning itself into a flame. "Ask Esther here if I haven't. She'll tell

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you. Your own daughter, too!—having to tell you your faults. I'd be ashamed. Thank goodness she takes after my side. She's a model, if I do say it myself. She——"

"Mamma! Why not let dad explain?"

"I only did what I thought was the best, my dear," interposed Trailey meekly. "Somebody had to kill the beastly thing. And even now you might get blood-poisoning."

"And you wouldn't care if I did. I know very well you've been wanting to get rid of me for years. I'm not blind. The trouble is——"

"Rubbish, my dear."

"——I've been too fond of you. But I'll go away. You just give me the money and I'll show you. It would suit you to see me go without a penny, wouldn't it? But I'm your wife, remember. Nobody would think so, though, if they knew the way you treated me. But I've got my rights. I'm no simpleton, if I have spoilt you. You—just—give—me—the—money, that's all," and, with this admirable attempt at a marital reconciliation, Martha Trailey dropped three large tears into the dirty pots.

Bits of fire still smouldered in the bluffs. The prairie was carpeted with ashes of burnt grass, which crunched beneath boots, and rose in a black, powdery dust. Clothes became permeated with it. The tramping horses and the wagon-wheels raised clouds of the stuff, and in the complete absence of

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wind it enveloped everything like an irritating fog. As the little convoy slowly made its way over the blackened ground, the men and women soon began to resemble nigger minstrels.

Fortunately, the fire, because of its speed, had left long, narrow strips of grass unburnt. Sloughs had turned aside the devouring blaze, which, in its raging haste to overwhelm everything, had occasionally blown itself completely out rather than retrace its course against the wind to lick up the patches it had missed.

It was upon these tiny areas of feed, and the coarse, rank, thatch grass standing above the water in the sloughs, that the hundreds of horses and oxen belonging to the colonists (and the freighters) had to depend for subsistence. A couple of weeks of this diet, followed by the new, sappy, green grass over which they positively went mad, put the finishing touches on scores of emaciated animals. In more ways than one, the scattered fragments of miserably thin pasture left by the fire were "the last straws" for many a dying horse.

Later on dozens of transport animals perished. Lack of care; the hardships of the two-hundred-mile trek; ignorant mishandling; swamp fever, and a feed ration entirely devoid of oats, put out of commission for a very long time even those which survived.

It was in the region where the Trailey party almost met with disaster by fire that the Rev. Isaac

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M. Barr gave final and complete demonstration that, although by profession a parson, he was by nature really a highwayman. He tried to corner the oat market for the benefit of the heroic colonists and their suffering horses. He bought all the oats available in the district at forty cents a bushel, and, without handling them, or even seeing them, left instructions with the vendors that they were to be retailed to the members of his party at one dollar per bushel. Such a modest profit must nearly have broken his Shylock heart.

By this time many of the colonists' horses were nothing but staggering bags of skeletons. Galled, neglected, literally dying through exposure, lack of care and proper feed, their ghastly condition wrung the spirit of one, Peter Paynter, from whom Barr had purchased most of the oats, and through whose yard the trail the colonists were following led.

Ordinarily a taciturn man, Peter Paynter's temper could flare up like a rocket, and die away as quickly. He was a true Westerner, and an ex-Mounted Policeman. When he deigned not to ignore the victims of his wrath, he didn't speak to them, he absolutely seared them. No man did more for the trekking Barr Colonists. He stretched his generous nature to the limit.

Paynter knew very little about religion, less still about theology, and practically nothing at all about the preaching of either. But his innate goodness was there all the same. It was like his skin—with

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him all the time; not like his Sunday suit, packed away and quite likely badly creased. His one fetish was the drawing in his mind, with a very sharp indelible pencil, a clean, straight line dividing right from wrong. This line put Barr well on the latter side.

The Trailey party happened to be camped near Paynter's ranch when the Rev. Isaac M. Barr (travelling light, with one companion and a big bag of oats) passed through on his way to Colony Headquarters. Besides point-blank refusing to stain his soul with the despicable oat deal, Paynter emptied his mind of its accumulation of bitter scorn all over the reverend philanthropist, very nearly making a martyr of him.

Barr was already beginning to look a good deal like a fugitive. He was taking everybody's blame, of course. That is one of the advantages of being a leader. In vivid language, many colonists had castigated him pretty severely. But Peter Paynter handled him pitilessly. The cold, steely eyes of the experienced Westerner read all the signs of the long trek. Unerringly, he gauged the misfortunes and hardships awaiting the colonists. Every wagon belonging to the party passed his door. The story of the struggle of the men, and the heroism of the women, was writ large for him. Mrs. Paynter squandered her foodstuffs, and her Irish sympathy.

This generous-hearted couple stamped their name ineffaceably on the memories of scores of grateful Barr Colonists.

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Over the oat transaction, Paynter dissected Barr into little pieces with his flaying speech. When the latter gathered up the bits, he found that there was a small fragment of his anatomy left over. Being somewhat at a loss to know what to do with it, Peter must have suggested that he make a tail of it, for immediately afterwards Sam and Bert saw him speeding into the setting sun, with something tucked ingloriously between his legs.

CHAPTER XVI

The End of the Trek

THE LITTLE party covered the last lap of their exhausting journey without encountering any special mishaps. Beyond being bogged a few more times, they enjoyed pretty decent luck.

The lustre of their equipment was now entirely worn off. Their bedraggled aspect contrasted vividly with the gorgeous appearance they had presented at the commencement of the pilgrimage. In spite of Martha Trailey's almost fanatical industry, outer garments rapidly deteriorated; shirts ripped; buttons disappeared, and neat spic-and-span-ness surrendered to the stains and rents and general frayed-out look consequent upon such a harsh trip.

Faces had peeled profusely. Hands once soft and white had now become hard and blistery. Scraggly whiskers competed with uncut hair to see which could make their wearers appear the most dishevelled. At first they all laughed at the changes; then ignored them; then, as everything is distinguishable only by contrast, they failed to take notice of them.

The earth was still black. Even crows and blackbirds contributed to the prevailing tint. As

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they drew near to the end of the trek, an occasional white tent could be seen far across the plain, looking for all the world like a small sailing boat on a vast blue sea. The colonists were going on to their land.

Seven weeks to the very day on which the *Lake Manitoba* had left Liverpool, they arrived at the point where an imaginary railway bisected an imaginary meridian of longitude, and chosen by a visionary leader as the site for the Colony's Headquarters. Having the sky above them, the Rocky Mountains not many hundred miles off, and a good big slough full of frogs close by to drink out of, everything was now all right.

Although weary, travel-worn, sick to death of baking-powder bread, surfeited with tent life, thoroughly disillusioned regarding "rarnching" and all the rest of the cock-and-bull theories born on the *Lake Manitoba*, yet no one was faint-hearted. They pitched their tents among the dozens of others whilst the rain, to keep them cheerful, fell down in sheets.

At least one thousand indomitable souls survived the trek. On the land which they had travelled five thousand miles to see, they were now as completely isolated from the world as a caravan in the middle of the Sahara.

The nearest settlements were an Indian Reservation forty miles to the north; Edmonton, two hundred miles west; Battleford, one hundred miles east; and southwards, the main line of the Canadian Pacific, more than one hundred and fifty miles away.

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Not a fence, not a road, scarcely a wagon track marked this huge, unbroken monotony. All round the Barr Colonists' reservation was a huge tract of country thousands of square miles larger in extent than the area of England, with hardly anybody in it.

The Colony was named Britannia. Whether this title was given to it because some exasperated lady had threatened Barr with a three-tined pitchfork, or whether it was on account of Britishers being so fond of water, is not accurately known; anyhow, the name, seeing that the settlement was a purely British one, was very fitting.

Pretty soon, at Headquarters Camp, with the intention of introducing a little variety into things, a number of the more discontented and disillusioned colonists called a meeting to decide whether to tar and feather, or lynch, the Rev. Isaac M. Barr. It is one of the peculiarities of history-making, that leaders always have to run these slight risks. So it was with Barr. Things were in a dreadful muddle. Flour was almost non-existent and expensive. The plainest necessities were either scarce or unobtainable. But there was a superabundance of 3-inch nails, and door-latches, which naturally helped things considerably.

Barr's genius for organization and money-making had long since deserted him. His fingers, which previously had grasped the reins of leadership, now much too frequently caressed the hard, smooth neck of a whiskey bottle. His brief day was over.

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Pestered to death by desperate colonists who desired some sort of settlement; absolutely cornered by others; despised by all; he fainted and dissembled to the last—then one night disappeared.

But there are several things Barr must be given credit for. Undoubtedly his original intentions were honest. He was quite entitled to make money out of the scheme. People who work for nothing are not so plentiful. Then he chose a fine stretch of fertile country for his Colony. Finally, no Barr Colonist, who is worth taking any notice of at all, ever said he regretted joining the movement, with its unforgettable experiences of humour and pluck. As a corollary, it may be mentioned that no man living could have been a perfect success as the leader of such a crowd as the Barr Colonists were at the start—not unless he could have enforced a sort of army discipline, with King's Regulations and sergeant-majors, and all the rest of the charming enactments devised for making rational men do what they don't wish to do.

Luckily, neither Trailey nor Bert had subscribed much money to Barr's schemes for founding a new Jerusalem in the great North-West. A few stray guineas handed over towards the founding of a community hospital comprised their total speculation. Nearly everyone bought shares in this particular venture, for the thought of being stricken by illness out in that vast loneliness was a very disquieting one. But these were the days before halitosis, and pyor-

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rhea, and appendicitis had begun to ravage humanity; so, except for a little dandruff and falling hair, caused by the mental strain of contriving to get something to eat, the colonists were almost free from disease. Trailey and Bert wrote off their trifling losses, leaving to the men whom Barr was less clear with, the task of bringing him to justice, and deciding what kind of lingering torture would be most acceptable to him.

The Rev. George Exton Lloyd—ultimately Bishop of Saskatchewan, and after whom Lloydminster, the Barr Colony town, is named—when coming through Battleford was, by a moderately representative meeting of colonists, invested with authority to lead that remnant of the party which craved to be led.

The mechanized world of business lost a good dynamo when Mr. Lloyd entered the church. Unfortunately for many of the run-down colonists, he was connected to their power scheme too late. Moreover, Britishers are not very keen on communistic ideals and faiths, even with masterful prophets as guides. Most of Barr's plans were too impracticable in any case; and, as a help to their total disintegration, the seeds of individualism planted in the temperaments of the colonists back in Britain now began to sprout and grow.

A few gregarious spirits for a long time fluttered round the altar candles, revelling in the rituals and ceremonies of the inner office shrine, and basking in

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the fierce white light shed by the new leader. The great majority of the colonists, though, were heartily sick of all guidance, except that provided by what they supposed was their own rugged common-sense. These took firm hold of their courage, scattered themselves over an expanse of prairie half as large as Wales, and without further fuss commenced tinkering with that delightful hobby known as the taming of homesteads.

The smash-up of Barr's schemes left his very personal followers high and dry. The worthier ones went farming. Some drifted into business. The sycophants, the satellites, the rump administrators, hung around Headquarters Camp for a few months, then vanished—some fairly slowly, like smoke on a calm evening; others swiftly, like jets of steam in a high wind.

CHAPTER XVII

Land Hunting

AT THIS period in Canada's political history, the government was lucky enough to possess the allegiance of large numbers of faithful followers. From among these loyal disciples, several men were nominated to administrative positions at Barr Colony Headquarters. One big, fat, short-necked man had been picked for the rather important post of agricultural adviser. Several men were deputed to teach the famous Barr Colonists the secrets of farming. This person was one of them. His grandfather, and father, together with many uncles and cousins, had all been staunch supporters of the only true political faith. With these unique qualifications to recommend him, he easily secured one of the coveted positions.

It is difficult to imagine what would have been the plight of the tenderfoot colonists had they been deprived of the services of this great man, who, in ordinary life, before the extremely efficient Canadian patronage system miraculously perceived in him the germs of a future farm genius, had been employed by various companies "down east" as an itinerant night watchman.

He resided in a tent which was situated next to

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that occupied by Sam and Bert. In order to accomplish something, so that he might be able to report the miracle in his official diary, this singularly-gifted farming expert suggested accompanying the Trailey party on a trip to find and inspect their land. Time was hanging very loosely on his hands.

After, with delightful tact, persuading a colonist who was located near Headquarters Camp that his plough handles weren't meant to be used as shafts, he had settled back to enjoy a well-merited interval of leisure, and had made himself thoroughly comfortable in his wedge-shaped tent. He hobbled his horses and turned them loose; built himself a permanent bedstead; gave a hard-up settler a dollar to dig a trench round his tent; made himself a mosquito veil—which also served to strain the bugs out of his drinking water—and altogether conducted himself like a very wise man. But even political heelers sometimes crave a change from doing nothing. Running into Bert one evening, he said:

"We'll hunt your land in the morning, if you like. Empty one of your wagons, and we'll go in that. Take the cover off, though." This political prodigy had no intention of allowing himself to be branded as a greenhorn, which travelling with a schooner-top might have done.

Bert agreed enthusiastically and said he would tell the others.

A careful examination of the map showed that the "bit of land" allotted to Sam and Bert by Barr

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aboard the S.S. *Lake Manitoba* was about ten miles due north of camp. The Barr Colony Headquarters Camp was located on a south-west quarter of the school section—one-half mile north from where the Lloydminster post-office now stands.

Trailey had often said he should "take up" one of the farms adjoining Sam's and Bert's. Upon learning of the proposed land-hunt, he reiterated his intention. There was already an improvised land office at the camp, doing a brisk trade.

"You 'old on a bit, guv'ner," advised Sam. "Don't be in such an 'urry. 'Ow d've know all this land ain't at the bottom of a blinkin' lake?"

"Very true, Sam," observed Trailey, who had never before been accused of being in a hurry, and was so overcome by the novel sensation that he retired to his tent and fell fast asleep.

The Barr Colonists were traversing the empty country in all directions, searching for their homesteads. Some hired land guides; others went alone. In their wanderings, some found good farms, and stuck to them, afraid to do otherwise; in some instances, fearful of losing themselves, besides the land.

Excellent homesteads were quite plentiful, yet some men decided on the other kind. A glittering duckpond, fringed with unburned aspens, created a much more favourable impression with some of the Englishmen than did open, level prairie. Thus it was that settlers coming to the district years

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later picked up better farms than the original colonists themselves secured.

The politico-watchman-agriculturist, now turned incipient land guide, travelled by compass; but, neglecting to take into account its variation, and excessive cheapness, he promptly lost himself. No one can know everything, of course. The ladies had come along to see the sights.

"You're not going to leave me, William," Mrs. Trailey had said when her husband suggested that she stay at the camp and rest. "I want to see where I'm going to spend the balance of my days," and she glanced comprehensively about her, smiling sardonically.

About four or five hours of meandering in a more or less northerly direction, the guide, who was driving the team, in endeavouring to discover his whereabouts, accidentally ran across a survey mound with an iron stake in it. He jumped down to inspect it.

"Fine hay!" he exclaimed, as he read the identification marks on the little tin plate and compared them with his map; "we're only eleven miles from your land," and he was so overjoyed, presumably to find himself still in Canada, that he suggested they should stay where they were for dinner.

Trailey always anticipated his meals rather longingly. He said he thought the suggestion was a very clever one, but upon Martha Trailey informing

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them that no provisions had been brought along, the guide was so disappointed that he spat out his chew of tobacco in mistake for the juice.

"Wot abaht it nah?" questioned Sam, who wanted to be moving.

The ex-watchman ignored the remark. "Don't Englishmen never eat?" he asked, helping himself to a fresh chew.

Looking very pathetic, Trailey was apparently too broken-hearted to say anything. The loss of a meal was the very worst catastrophe that could happen to him. Martha flashed a withering glance at her husband and said in what she probably thought was a whisper:

"So he thinks this is a picnic, does he? Why don't you speak up like a man and tell him we aren't trapesing all over this wilderness for the joy of it? We've come to see our land, not to get lost. You could have lost us, without bringing him along. We're a pack of fools to come out with a man who can't find his way in his own country. Why, even the rats are laughing at us"—Mrs. Trailey indicated a gopher which sat up cheekily and squeaked at them; then, with an indescribably contemptuous gesture, she regarded the lost guide, who stood at the corner post, a few yards away, and said: "God help Canada if there are many men like him working for it." With this heart-felt invocation on behalf of a heeler-ridden country, she picked one of her husband's loose hairs from off the sleeve of her black

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coat and threw it to the bottom of the wagon box with great force.

"Hush, Martha!" whispered Trailey, who stood beside his wife in the wagon; "he will hear you."

"Yes, that's always your cry," retorted Mrs. Trailey, raising her voice. "Anything for peace and quietness. If you had a family of squalling children, and a wife that gabbled like two monkeys in a cage turned upside down, I could understand it. All you think about is to be quiet, and sigh, and sleep. You mark my words, you'll die in your sleep one of these afternoons. Men with short, thick necks like you've got always do; at any rate, they generally go off sudden instead of——"

"*He* may die of shortness of breath, lydy," Sam broke in facetiously, "but you never will"—then, addressing the guide, who was still standing at the corner post very much perplexed, he said: "Come on, driver; tyke us 'ome aht of this."

Everyone was hungry and tired, and sickened with the jolting of the wagon. The guide clambered aboard. Just as he set the horses in motion, Mrs. Trailey opened her mouth to utter some new profundity or other, when the wagon rather opportunely bumped over a couple or so of very large badger holes, the consequent shaking causing her words of wisdom to be reserved for a future occasion.

"We'll come an' find our land ourselves, ter-morrer," said Sam to Bert, who was blissfully unconscious of everything except the nearness of

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Esther, with whom he had been exchanging some exquisite silences.

Although they knew their exact whereabouts on the map, finding their way about proved anything but easy. Sam was for travelling back along their own wheel marks, but the guide, who on his step-mother's side must have been one of jolly old Euclid's direct descendants, said he could hit camp in a straight line, and thus save several miles.

Presently they stopped again to check up their position.

"Anyway, there's the sun," said the vocational contortionist, squinting upwards. He became frightfully meditative, first consulting his watch, then the synthetic compass.

"Yus, that's the sun," agreed Sam, cocking an eye at the dazzling orb.

"And it's three-thirty, ain't it?" added the guide, pulling his watch out again and surveying it abstractedly.

"No, it ain't; it's six o'clock," Sam contradicted, and he showed the other a large, handsome chronometer enclosed in a dust-proof celluloid case which any near-sighted person might excusably have taken to be an old-fashioned warming-pan. To settle the dispute, they appealed to Trailey, who withdrew a beautiful gold timepiece from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Ten o'clock," said he; then, holding the watch to his ear, with a sceptical look on his face, and a distrustful feeling in his stomach, he added: "Ah!

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wait a minute. I forgot. My watch has never gone since I fell into the slough."

"Wot's yourn say?" asked Sam, this time appealing to Bert, who was engrossed with Esther at the rear of the wagon. Breaking off in the middle of a sweet nothing, that young gentleman replied:

"Mine's no use. It only boasts one hand—the big one."

"Anyway," observed the farming instructor, pointing with a fingernail, which was in deep mourning, to a place on the map, "here's where we are now—fifteen miles north-west of camp. And the sun sets in the west, don't it?" He looked at Sam, who nodded with mock attention. "And rises in the east?"—Sam again nodded. "So at noon, it's due south, ain't it?" Sam ran his eyes up and down the guide's massive figure.

"Wot's due south?"

Slightly exhausted by the effort of making so extremely abstruse a deduction, the guide replied wearily: "The sun."

"I thought it was the camp you was findin'," said Sam innocently.

"My God!" muttered the government astronomer; "don't you see what I'm a-tryin' to get at?"

"Tryin' ter get us 'ome, aren't yer?"

"Yes."

"Well, do it then; an' don't 'ammergag abaht so damn much."

The guide was shocked. He glanced furtively

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at the ladies, then back at Sam, and seemed so upset about something that he permitted a trickle of dark-coloured saliva to escape from the corner of his mouth and mingle with his stubbly black whiskers.

"Do you Englishmen swear in front of your women?" he asked in an awed whisper.

Sam laughed flippantly at the terrible accusation. How was he to know that his remark would offend the delicate susceptibility of the guide, who in his youth had received a very strict religious training? It wasn't Sam's fault that Bermondsey happened to be a hundred years ahead of Eastern Canada in the drift to Naturalism.

"Only when we come 'ome arfter midnight," Sam replied, "an' find dinner ain't ready"—then, noticing a look settling on the other face expressive of blank amazement at the awful degradation of Englishmen, he said: "But don't bovver abaht that, my son. Wipe yer mouf, an' don't ferget we want ter get back ter camp."

"Sure," remarked the perfectly disgusted heeler, unconsciously scratching that part of himself where thought is supposed to be generated; "I ain't forgot. I'm kind of figuring things up in my head." He concentrated desperately for a minute or two.

"Ycah!" he exclaimed suddenly, as an inspiration struck him. "I see, now. If that there hill over there is south at twelve o'clock, it must be over there at three-thirty. That's right, ain't it?"

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And if south is there"—pointing a pulpy finger more or less in that direction—"that willow there must be south-east, eh?" and he indicated a clump of willow which looked very much like thousands more round about. "Keep your eye on them willows, young fellow, while I handle the team."

Sam did as he was told, till a gnat or something flew into one of his eyes, distracting his attention.

"We can't go wrong, now," the guide continued confidently. "By gosh! it's a good thing I remembered that trick with a watch—Giddap there!—ain't it?"

"I wouldn't care if we 'ad some grub," said Sam—"would you? If I was in yore place an' 'ad ter find me way abaht this blinkin' country, I'd allus tyke plenty of grub along—bacon, an' cawffee, an' tinned 'am, an' pickled warnuts, an' things like that——"

"Get up ter hell out of here, you dod-gasted, flea-bitten ——, where d'you reckon you are taking us to?" muttered the driving prodigy below his breath. These gentle words were intended for one of the antiques in harness in front of him, the remarkable refinement of sentiment being made doubly commendable through being accompanied by a smart flip of the lines, administered with great dexterity and feeling. To Sam he made no reply, but he looked spiteful.

"Look! There's a tent!" shouted Mrs. Trailey presently. Pitched by the side of a "duckpond"

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was a lone, bell-shaped tent. It came into view over the top of a gently-rolling hill. The guide at once steered the team towards it.

"They're sure to have a wagon-track leading to camp," he said; "we can follow that. My compass ain't no good."

Sam appreciated the sense of the statement, especially as he had long since lost sight of the bunch of willow, or rather had exchanged it for another one, which to him looked much prettier.

"Yes, this is my land," said the owner of the tent proudly, replying to a question from the government man. "What d'you think of it?" Judged by his accent, the colonist was evidently an educated man. He unfastened his eyes from the surrounding wilderness and fixed them upon the face of first one and then another of the wagon's occupants. His well-cut clothes were on their last legs, but he seemed as happy and as contented as though he were on the beach at Bournemouth. His wife stood in the entrance to the tent. She was very pretty, with big, brown, jolly eyes. No children were visible. They both appeared to be as unconscious of their isolation as a pair of gulls might be in the middle of the Atlantic.

"Nice place," said the guide tactfully—"especially when you get it broke. First-class soil round them willows," and he nodded towards several thousand clumps of this hardy shrub, each of them with a root-crown as big as a dining-table.

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"We think it is an awfully pretty place," said the settler.

The astronomical genius in the wagon swept with appraising eyes the acres of brush and slough which garnished the dismal vicinity. Very discreetly he remained silent.

The sun was luxuriously warm; frogs shrilled in the sloughs, which were thickly scattered about the district; crows swore hoarsely; numerous gophers scampered back and forth between the little piles of soil marking the entrances to their burrows; a delicate tinge of green was everywhere hiding the brownish earth, now washed clean by recent rains.

Sam looked round him interestedly. "Where are yer thinkin' of buildin' the 'ouse?" He knew this question would be well received. It was. Nothing was of more interest to the Barr Colonists. Happy hours were spent in choosing sites for humble, log shacks.

"My wife says she should like to be on that ridge." The colonist cast enthusiastic eyes towards a distant hogback. "It certainly is a magnificent view from there. We can see camp quite plainly."

"'Andsome plyce," commented Sam; "an' very easy ter find if you 'appen ter lose yerself." The man smiled, a little wanly.

"Fine hay!" ejaculated the driver. "I knew I was heading right." He was enormously tickled, and grew quite jocose. So, after finding the trail, they wished the settler "Good-day" and set off again.

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Three hours later camp was reached. They were desperately hungry; dead tired; slightly peeved and disappointed at having seen all the land in the country except their very own piece; much disgusted with amateur land guides, but nevertheless incurably hopeful.

After a good meal, which he had to cook himself, followed by a cigar, the ex-night-watchman felt very expansive. "Damn green Englishmen, anyway!" he muttered, as he opened his official diary and spread the report of his trip over four days' space. Then, remembering that he was a very patriotic man, and working for the good of his country, he made a rough note of his expenses, not omitting to charge for a dinner of which he had not partaken. To compensate himself for the great damage the abstinence had inflicted on his constitution, he modestly doubled the amount.

CHAPTER XVIII

Wilderness—Planning for Next Year

NEXT morning Sam roused the Traileys early. After eating a substantial breakfast, they all set off to find their land. The top section of the wagon box was removed, and their own two spring-seats, plus another borrowed one, were taken along for the sake of the additional comfort they afforded.

The weather was perfect. The cool, clear brilliance of the atmosphere; the stimulating early morning breeze; the entire absence of conventional restraint; the prospect of viewing their very own piece of land, all caused their spirits to soar with joy and hope.

The appealing strangeness of everything entranced them; and the almost unlimited freedom to go anywhere, and do anything, they pleased, filled them with a sort of youthful wonder. Even Martha Trailey, although she was inclined to apply the acid test to everything, was agreeably impressed.

"It certainly makes a body feel like bustling about and accomplishing something, doesn't it, William? What a perfect wash-day!"

Trailey pulled down the string, on the end of which he for the time being was flying his thoughts,

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considered a moment, then said he hoped she hadn't forgotten to bring food supplies along in case of accident.

Esther and Bert were sitting together on the hindmost seat, alternately sipping at the heaven in each other's eyes, and making joyous mating noises. The Traileys occupied the middle seat, and Sam, who manipulated the ribbons, the front one.

A surveyor who was in the camp gave them a bee line due north with his transit. "Fix your eyes on that gap in those hills," he said, "and keep as straight for it as you can. Then, when you think you've done ten miles, look about for a mound. The grass being burned off will make it easier for you to find one." This conversation took place atop of a ridge slightly north of camp. It all sounded simple enough.

"But 'ow shall we know when we've gone that far?" asked Sam.

The surveyor glanced at the team, and then at the men, and, after pondering a couple of seconds, replied: "I guess you will have gone far enough when you've been travelling four hours. You'll be within a mile or so of your land, anyway—unless, of course, you run into trouble." He was a short, merry, affable man, clear-eyed and burnt as dark as an Indian. So off they set.

For nearly four hours they drove through a country whose topography was about half open prairie, and half brush and slough. Their hopes

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sank a little. The district wasn't even pretty—the very first test most Barr Colonists invariably applied to their surroundings. A few early mosquitoes tormented them; big yellow, and small grey, brutes of a malignancy only equalled by their pronounced fondness for thick, rich, English blood.

The quality of the soil, or the nature of the subsoil, bothered their innocence not at all. What they desired above everything else was for their "bit of land" to be like a park; not like the Dukeries, nor like Chatsworth; but something infinitely more alluring, if only because of its freedom from artificiality.

Once Sam said jestingly: "Look! there's a rippin' plyce ter live," and he pointed at a patch of delicately-tinted aspens which were growing right out of a little gleaming "lake" upon which a pair of mallards sailed as stately as swans.

"Oh, how sweet!" cried Esther. Bert was just then squeezing her hand beneath the folds of her coat—a light-blue, satiny affair.

"Yes, isn't it?" echoed Bert, as he admired Esther's splendid profile.

"Ah-h," sighed Trailey, lovingly regarding a speck of egg-yolk which nestled between the fourth and fifth buttons of his somewhat wrinkled waist-coat—"it's over four hours since we started—it must be. Perhaps we'd better have our lunch and find the land afterwards; we could do it much better then."

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"Fancy living there!" exclaimed Esther, "in a nice little bungalow, with a rustic summer-house, and a tennis lawn, and a swimming pool, and a few perfectly darling——"

"Kids to feed, and mend for, and wash," snapped her mother.

"——Lambs, I was going to say, mamma," corrected Esther. She was blushing like a rose. "Oh, how can people exist in cities!"

"How can they exist out here; that's what I want to know. Someone who is clever"—casting a sidelong, scornful look at her husband—"kindly tell me that. This isn't a page in a novelette, my girl, if you think it is. Day after day money going out, and nothing coming in; it's wicked."

Sam guided the horses round a clump of Saskatoon brush, and rose brush, which screened some freshly-excavated badger holes.

"You've 'it the blinkin' nyle on the 'ead, missis. People can't eat trees, an' sloughs, an' lawn tennis"—and observing the gladsome pair on the rear seat basking in each other's presence, Sam added mischievously—"nor love, neither."

Presently, after choosing a few more ideal building sites; and after murdering some of the more ravenous of the mosquitoes; and after Martha Trailey had lectured at considerable length to a very unsympathetic audience on the disagreeable topic of first getting hold of some money before they

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could spend it, they found themselves emerging into a different kind of country.

Swamps became less frequent; trees more scattered; wide stretches of undulating prairie spread out all round them; and, instead of the skyline being limited to a view over the top of smudges of budding red willow, it occasionally extended to enormous distances.

"I'm sure we've gone far enough," complained Trailey for the twentieth time. He was examining his watch again, and wondering, seemingly, what was preventing the hands from moving.

"All right, guv'ner," said Sam; "there ain't much daht abaht it nah. We've bin travellin' four 'ours and an' 'alf, ter myke up fer dodgin' rahnd them sloughs back there," and the little man pulled his own watch out and exposed it to the gaze of his admiring friends. "Hinglish lever," he explained, proudly, "made in Switzerland—bought it orff'n a Rushin' Jew fer thirty bob; runs like a blinkin' top, not 'alf, it don't. Lissen to it tickin'!"

Fortunately, the wagon was not in motion just then, so there was only the squawking of seventy or eighty crows in some trees overhead competing with the watch's rhythmic beating, which, besides being plainly audible, positively jarred the wagon.

"Splendid," laughed Bert; "but put it away, Sam, old boy, now it's served its purpose; it's a trifle too ostentatious for these surroundings."

With these playful remarks, and, realizing that

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further spooning was for the time being impossible, if not unwise, Bert gently disentangled himself from love's web of bliss and jumped to the ground.

Taking the risk of losing themselves on empty stomachs clean out of the hands of an extremely unreliable Fate, they first fortified themselves with food. It was a pleasant little picnic. Hard-boiled eggs, bannock and jam, and coffee without milk and sugar (the last-mentioned made on a campfire with water from a neighbouring "trout stream"), put them all in a very optimistic humour.

No wonder the minds of the Barr Colonists were filled with idealism. Only a few days before, not a speck of verdure had been visible anywhere. Now, almost magically, the trees not killed by the fire burst into leaf.

"Isn't everything lovely?" cried Esther, as she looked rapturously about her.

Beauty unfolded itself like the buds on the aspens, and as quickly. What in the morning, on the branches of the trees, were merely clusters of wax-like, tight-closed shells, were by evening myriads of fluttering leaves of the tenderest green. The long, warm days of a single week transformed the prairie from a blackened and ugly cinder to a delicate loveliness. Here was Nature in all its primeval beauty, its freshness and wildness still unsullied.

Robins called to each other from the swaying tops of trees. An occasional rabbit rushed across

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from one thicket to another in a wild burlesque of speed, as if it had somewhere urgent to go—then sat still for half a day. A pair of hawks, with motionless wings, circled in the agate sky. With a strange mixture of daring and innocence, gophers sat up like squirrels and squeaked defiance in thin, piercing notes. Egotistical wood-partridges strutted about, openly defying all laws of self-preservation—dainty bits of vanity; they must have known that feather ruffs were then all the rage.

After William Trailey had annihilated a very profound void within himself, he suggested, with his accustomed acumen, that he should stay and mind the camp while the others cast about for survey mounds.

"A good arrangement," agreed Bert. They failed to remember that it was quite safe to leave their stuff unguarded, seeing that for hundreds of miles around them there was scarcely a soul; but the habits of civilization, which numbers theft among its minor attributes, still persisted.

So Sam set off in one direction, and Mrs. Trailey, very gingerly, in another; whilst Trailey, as arranged, minded the horses and the other things with dreamful fidelity. Esther and Bert started out separately, but, finding solitude very inimical to the discovery of corner stakes, they quickly came together again, sat down, said what a lovely day it was, and then commenced a dialogue packed full with hidden meanings.

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Very soon a shrill halloo from the direction in which Mrs. Trailey had gone brought Sam hurrying towards her.

"Here's one," she said, pointing to a burnt stick which jutted up from the ground among a number of large-sized badger holes.

"That ain't a corner post, missis. Them post-s they put rahnd these farms is made of iron, wiv a piece of tin on 'em."

"Ridiculous, Sam!" retorted Mrs. Trailey. "How can a post be made of iron?"

"Don't know, ma'am, but that bit of wood ain't wot we're lookin' for."

The task they had set themselves was not unlike the searching for a nest in a ten-acre field. The odds were against them. Nevertheless, it was the only method they could use, apart from securing the services of a competent surveyor, or land guide.

Before long, corner posts having steadfastly refused to show themselves, Sam wandered along to confer with Bert. Clearing his throat loudly to signal his approach, he came upon the love-smitten pair round the bend of a poplar bluff. They were apparently absorbed in watching the antics of a couple of crows building a nest of sticks in one of the trees of a wood opposite.

"We can't find no blinkin' corner post-s," said Sam—"can you?"

"No," replied Bert, with a very straight face,

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"we've had no luck at all. What d'you suppose we'd better do?—move on a little farther?"

Sam thought a moment. "Can't do nothink else, I suppose. We—— Hey! Wot's this!" He stood looking down at a big, square hole which had obviously at some time or another been excavated by a man with a spade.

"What's what?"

"Why, this 'ole," returned Sam, pointing to a square, grass-grown depression at his feet. There were three similar ones to match it, all geometrically placed and equidistant.

The lovers stood up. Looking at the knoll upon which he and Esther had been sitting, Bert burst out laughing.

"Why, it's a bally survey mound, dash my wig if it isn't; and we've actually been sitting on it all the time. There's the stake—see!"

Esther was so delighted that she had to lean against her lover for support. "How lucky!" she said sweetly. "It may be the corner of your land, Bertie—our land," and she gently squeezed her companion's arm as she added: "Wouldn't it be splendid to think of those dear little crows guiding us to it? It would be quite like Elisha—or Joshua, I forget which—being fed by the ravens, wouldn't it, Sam?" Esther turned to Sam, smiling happily.

Sam had a vague idea that she was referring to something in the Bible, about which he possessed but hazy notions. All he really knew about the

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good book was that he had once seen one of his acquaintances passionately kiss a copy in a police court, and then swear his name was Johnson when he knew for a fact his last name had been Smith.

The pair of crows, boasting even less Biblical knowledge than the little Cockney did, screamed and chattered with rage at being molested in their house-building activities. Bert stooped down and read the figures on the little tin plate, which was pierced by the iron survey stake, and then inspected a map he had pulled from his pocket.

"We are only a couple of miles from our land, Sam. That's a bit of good luck, eh? You must have driven the team almost due north this morning. Fancy that blighter yesterday taking us all over creation!"

"'Ow abaht goin' the uvver two miles?"

"Oh, we can guess at that near enough. The land is due north from here. It will be in that direction." Bert glanced quickly at the sun, then pointed to where the prairie spread out, beyond a few scattered bluffs, into a huge, open country. Through the openings between the trees, the vista seemed to extend over the edge of the world. They returned to their camp to consult with Trailey. After communing with the spirits, that gentleman would very likely be in excellent fettle for making some useful suggestions. Except in matters to do with the party's commissariat, his innocuous advice

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was never heeded by the others, although for courtesy's sake he was always consulted.

The mosquitoes were playing terrible havoc with him, yet he still slept. He was flat on his back. A handkerchief covered his face, and his thick, podgy hands were clasped across his waistcoat. Where the handkerchief rested on his nose was the spot chosen by three or four very intelligent mosquitoes as an ideal place to drill for blood. Others had taken a keen fancy to his white, smooth wrists; yet others, the obtuse ones, to his beefy ankles decked out in home-knit socks of rugged texture.

"Wake up, dad!" called Esther to her beloved parent. She gently drew the handkerchief off his face. "We've almost found the land!"

Trailey opened his eyes, stared at the vivid blue sky above him, sat up, blinked a few times, then slowly came to life.

"Where are we, my dear?" he yawned, as he unconsciously attacked his wrists with his fingernails, from which operation he appeared to derive exquisite pleasure. Then he felt of his nose.

"Can you see anything wrong with my nose, Esther? I've been dreaming I was tied down fast in a beehive."

"The mosquitoes have bitten you, dad, that's all," laughed Esther. "It'll be better when it's swelled, and it's doing that now. Pain always subsides after swelling. But, come along, Sam's

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getting the horses ready, and I'm going to pack up." Assisted by Bert, Esther began to clear away the remains of the banquet.

"By Jove! these bites are painful, Esther; and the itching is maddening," groaned Trailey, scratch-his wrists and ankles vigorously.

"That shows they're getting better, dad," laughed Esther, with that perfect sympathy for which very young women are noted. Curiously, she herself was not the slightest bit bothered by the mosquitoes.

"I hope it does," said Trailey miserably. "Have we anything I could put on the bites, my—Oh! here's your mother; she'll know what to do!"

Martha Trailey, red-faced and irritable, strode into camp.

"It serves you right, you lazy good-for-nothing, you." She had obviously overheard the few last remarks. "Here we've been walking our legs off while you've been fast asleep. Don't deny it!"—Trailey half-opened his mouth to yawn—"I can always tell when you are going to lie. Just fancy a man ever dreaming of lying to his own wife! I'd sooner have a man who comes home late at night than I'd have a liar. Oh, dear, I wonder why it should always be poor me who gets the trouble! Other women's husbands may drink on the sly, but they never lie to their wives, like you were just going to do to me. Mrs. Lightfoot-Mott, who

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lived next door to us on the Boulevard, said her husband had never once told her a lie. There was a nice man for you! Quiet, unassuming, took his children out for walks on Sundays, thought the world of his wife, and never drank. He simply worshipped money, though. And wasn't she a cat! Tattle! You couldn't believe a single word she said. And she'd no more idea of how to dress her children than——"

Neither had William Trailey any more intention of lying to his wife than he had of going into the diplomatic service. He was much too distressed by his bites to pay a great deal of attention to what she was saying. Having no settled abode was fast making Martha Trailey unbearably fretful. With no home to scrub, and wash, and cover up with old newspapers from the dirt, she was as unhappy as a cat with sticky fur.

Trailey did an unusual thing for him. He got up in the middle of his wife's speech and abruptly walked away to the imitation trout stream, where he began diligently to bathe his nose and wrists and ankles, an occupation from which he extracted some temporary relief.

Sam soon put the horses in the wagon, and, after everything was loaded up, drove over to the recently-discovered survey mound.

Here the problem of correctly striking the course of the final lap presented itself. A little deviation, a very slight overstepping of the mark,

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or an under-estimation of the distance, might cause them endless trouble. Bert's brow clouded. Esther was alarmed.

"What's the matter, darling?" she whispered. "You don't feel ill, do you?"

He had already given the present matter some hasty consideration. Since discovering the corner stake, he had compelled his brain to focus itself on the devising of a way of them travelling a farther two miles with as little error as possible. He would much rather have amused himself with his charming companion, and left the task to Sam, but driving the horses kept the latter sufficiently busy. Besides, there was a smattering of geometry needed now.

"Three thousand five hundred and twenty yards from here is our south-east corner, eh, Sam?" The south half of section thirty-six, township fifty-one, range one, west of the fourth meridian, was the "bit of land" Barr had generously allotted to them aboard the S.S. *Lake Manitoba* in mid-Atlantic.

Sam nodded and looked tremendously erudite. Bert said: "How would it be to try that surveyor's dodge with the wagon-wheel—counting the revolutions, y'know?"

Sam remembered hearing about this experiment at Headquarters, but he was very foggy regarding it, so he continued looking wise. Bert pondered.

"I wonder what the exact circumference of this hind wheel is. Got a tape measure anywhere, Esther?"

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Mrs. Trailey said her tape measure was half-way down one of the packing-cases, back at the camp. Esther said she was so sorry not to have one, but would a hairpin be of any use. Trailey sighed and sat down on a knoll to rest. Bert stood beside the wagon. He knew he was approximately six feet tall, so he said to Sam, pulling off his cap: "How far from the top of my head is the top of the wheel?"

"Abaht a couple of foot," replied Sam, looking up and down between the crown of Bert's blonde head, and the wheel's rim.

"Must be a four-foot wheel, then," said Bert. "Standard size, probably. Good." After a little mental arithmetic, which resolved into nothing but a fuzz in his head, he worked out an abstruse problem on the back of an envelope. "That's four yards round the wheel. Four into thirty-five hundred and twenty, goes—what? Eight hundred and eighty. That's it, Sam."

"Wot are yer reck'nin'?"

"Nothing," muttered Bert, checking his figures carefully.

"Thought so. 'Ello! Wot's the matter wiv the ole man!" Everybody turned to look at William Trailey, who was enormously agitated about something.

"Martha! Martha! Come and help me," he moaned. "Oh, be quick! Millions of insects are crawling up my legs. I'm alive with them."

Trailey had merely fallen asleep on an ant-hill.

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Swarms of big black ants with wicked-looking red heads crept all over him. Nothing like this had ever come their way before. The little brutes were evidently debauched. Trailey grasped bunches of his trousers, and his waistcoat, in his agony, only to release them for fresh grips elsewhere.

"I'm alive! I'm alive!" he groaned in horror. "What's the best thing to do, Martha? They're all inside my vest, under my arms, and crawling up—ugh-h-h—my back," he shuddered.

"Oh, what can I do?" cried Mrs. Trailey, as she tore his coat off, and then his waistcoat, and inserted her hand down inside the back of his shirt, in a noble—though exceedingly timorous—attempt to clutch the voracious ants out in handfuls. Meanwhile her husband was becoming frantic, chiefly as a result of the frightful, crawling sensation. The little beasts had dispatched scouts to explore this monumental acquisition of food. These it was which had about reached the victim's collar-bone, and were making preparations for entering his whiskers.

Esther brought her singular presence of mind to the rescue as usual. Approaching quite near to her tortured sire, she made several suggestions, some sensible, but most of them idiotic; then she saw an ant on her ankle. Abandoning her father to his fate, she dithered four times, screeched, pointed to her foot, called on Bert to save her, saw that her lover was extremely well-placed for her reception, then

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calmly closing her eyes fell back into his willing arms.

In spite of every effort to defeat the ants, Mrs. Trailey was beaten. She acknowledged it.

"I can't do any more for you, William," she sobbed—"unless we make a fire and throw you on it. But it's judgment on you, you may depend. It's an omen. You'll be this way all your life—on and off; you see if you're not. It's a plague on you for your wickedness," and Mrs. Trailey picked two ants from her tortured husband's neck courageously, threw them on the ground savagely, and then stamped on them. "There, you horrible little brutes," she uttered from behind clenched teeth, "that finishes you."

But Trailey's lucky star had only hidden itself behind a fleeting cloud. Sam jumped down from the wagon, and took charge of the situation.

"Watch the 'orsis," he commanded Bert, "an' you, ma'am, get aht of the way, please," then, grasping the distracted Trailey's arm, and assisting him to his feet, he said sympathetically: "Come on, guv'ner; come wiv me," and off they made for a hidden slough, of which there were plenty about, where he stripped his whimpering charge naked, swilled him down with double-handfuls of cold water; and, while the tormented man gasped and choked and coughed, he shook, squeezed, and finally drowned the ants out of his clothes.

When the excitement had subsided, Bert reluc-

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tantly let go of Esther's waist and went on with his mathematical calculations. He tied his handkerchief tightly round a spoke of one of the rear wheels of the wagon, near the rim, and then turned to Esther again.

"Will you ride in the wagon, Esther, and count the number of revolutions the wheel makes? When it has gone round eight hundred and eighty times, tell Sam to stop. Make a mark on the wagon for each hundred, so you won't lose count"—handing Esther a pencil—"then if we've travelled due north we shall be quite close to our land. It should be fairly easy. The country is open beyond those trees."

Esther smiled understanding, and held out her arms for her instructor to assist her into the wagon. She was only a very moderate tennis player, and swimmer; and had never walked above twenty-five miles in one day in her life, so, naturally, she found climbing into a wagon rather difficult.

Mr. and Mrs. Trailey both expressed a wish to ride, so they, too, scrambled aboard. Bert walked behind the wagon a little way, to help Sam to keep a straight course, or one as straight as the gently-swelling prairie would permit. They had previously determined that a blue knob on the distant sky-line was as nearly north as could be judged. The little Cockney fixed his eyes grimly upon it, and forthwith set the jolting geometrical apparatus in motion.

The brush land soon terminated. Suddenly

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they came out on a sort of shoulder, whence the prairie sloped away to the north and east for an immense distance. A huge region unfolded itself before them. They bumped along, winding round impassable places which every now and again persisted in getting in their way. Esther counted religiously, sometimes in a whisper, sometimes mentally, then, to give herself confidence, right out loud. She regretted missing the beauty of the scene, which from the corner of her eyes she was vividly aware of.

At length she exclaimed. "There—that's it." Sam stopped.

"Go a little farther, Sam," ordered Bert, "to allow for the curves and dips."

The Traileys were utterly silent. Once or twice his excruciating itching almost forced William Trailey to seek relief in outcry, but his wife, noting the symptoms, quickly snubbed him with a look. She was intensely occupied with the study of the neighbourhood. Not being particularly responsive to Nature's masterpieces, not big ones especially, she kept her lips shut tight. A look of derision was in her eyes.

Burned bare of all old vegetation, the ground was as smooth as a recently-mown meadow, and presented no great hindrance to the discovery of their identification mound. For a certainty their land was within a few hundred yards of them. At last they stopped.

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Leaving the two older people to their thoughts, and bites, Sam and Bert and Esther gleefully began criss-crossing the prairie, which hereabouts was wide-open and perfectly bald. Within half an hour, the south-east corner post was found, very appropriately by the two lovers.

In one vast sweep the country rolled away in successive undulations until, twenty to thirty miles off, it rose again sharply in a long line of rounded hills. Beyond these the mighty Saskatchewan cut its mile-wide swath. Such was their elevation, and so marvellously clear was the air, that through the depressions in the distant ridge, they saw the long, flat, inky stain where the sky dipped into the dark, silent forests of the north.

In the foreground, below them, were several lakes—genuine ones, this time—set in the pale-green earth like jewels. Patches of fire-killed brush smudged the landscape here and there with sombre blacks and browns.

"Magnificent!" was the general exclamation. They beckoned to the occupants of the wagon, which Trailey, looking very awkward and miserable, then drove across.

"To think," Esther observed, "that with the exception of the few Barr Colonists looking for their farms, there isn't a soul in all that vast space." She was profoundly impressed by the bigness of the picture.

"Quite true," commented Bert shortly. He

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was adjusting his thoughts to the startling immensity of everything. After a long silence, he added: "It's all laid out on such a stupendous scale that it makes one feel exactly like an ant."

At the word "ant," Trailey felt a creepy sensation in the region of his shoulder-blades. He tried to reach the spot with his hand, but was unable, so he gently rubbed his back against the seat. So heavenly was the relief, that his spirit reacted to the wonderful picture before him. He sat in the wagon, and with absolutely expressionless eyes contemplated Nature's magnificent canvas.

"Not a building," he sighed; "not a street; not a tram; not a chapel; not even a restaurant where you can get a sixpenny plate of beef and potatoes to eat while you read the *British Weekly*"—then, lowering his voice, he gently whispered to himself with perfectly-delightful incongruity: "From Greenland's icy mountains, to India's——" but, as it was an exceedingly warm afternoon, and as he was enjoying a certain amount of freedom from the itching of his various stings, his head, which he had protected from the sun and the insects with a handkerchief pushed up round and under the back of his cap, fell forward on his ample breast, in which comfortable position he half dozed off.

Martha Trailey's musings ran in different grooves. She regarded her volcanic spouse with unutterable disdain, then echoed him mockingly:

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"No out-door relief; no asylums; no almshouses; no workhouses; no soup kitchens; no——"

Interrupting her satirically, Sam took up the refrain: "An' no pubs; no music 'alls; no kids sellin' matches; no cawffee stalls; no tarts ter wink at yer; in fact, absobloomin'lutely nothink."

Esther and Bert had wandered off, ostensibly to inspect their land; actually, to pick a place to build a nest.

"We must build it of logs, Bertie." Esther, like the crows, possessed a pronounced bump of rusticity.

Martha Trailey nudged her husband into complete wakefulness.

"Aren't you going to look at that other farm now we're here?" she said irritably.

Trailey yawned cavernously. It was oppressively warm.

"No, my dear," he returned, "I've made up my mind to go back to England," and with this sudden declaration, he quietly relapsed into his usual drowsy calm. Martha Trailey was totally deprived of speech for a minute, then she recovered.

"It's no more than I expected," she retorted scornfully; "didn't I say so in England? Didn't I tell you that time when you were sitting in the chair, planting a tree in the front garden, that you were making a mistake in coming to Canada? And do you think I'm going back to be laughed at by all the chapel-folks?—after them making us a present

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of an illuminated hymn book? And after the speech you made at the insurance superintendents' banquet, when you drank too much of that teetotal port wine, and then told them that you felt the pioneering blood surging through your veins? No! You aren't going to drag me back over all those thousands of miles of fire and flood; let me tell you that. You've had your own way far too long. I've given in to you too much. Your mother always said so. But I'll have my way for once; remember that. And, another thing, Esther will never go back. She's going to marry that Bert Tressider, or else I'm blind."

"Marry Bert Tressider!" exclaimed Trailey with a slight show of interest.

"Yes, Bert Tressider. That's news for you, I'll be bound. He's an educated fool, of course; but, when I look back at what you were when I married you, it seems to me she might go farther and fare worse."

Trailey scratched his wrist. "God bless my soul! How long has all this been going on?"

Martha Trailey turned away from her husband with a gesture of disgust. Such blindness was inconceivable to her.

"Why, it's been going on ever since we left Saskatoon. Look! there they are, over yonder; giggling and cuddling, you may depend. Said they were going to pick a place to build a bungalow."

Mrs. Trailey was silent for a little while. She

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gazed pensively after the youthful lovers, who meandered about the prairie some distance off. At length she continued philosophically: "Life's a very funny thing, I'm thinking. Look at those two—only known each other three weeks and as happy as two dead birds; yet here we've been together getting on for thirty years and squabbling all the time—and all because you won't control your ungovernable temper."

"Mr. Tressider's a good match for Esther, isn't he, my dear?" observed Trailey meekly. "I know I've often watched them and thought how nice they looked together. And he's a gentleman."

"Oh, he's a gentleman, right enough; but it's no more than Esther deserves. She's a very good girl, and it's been a pleasure to train her. I know I've done my best for her, and you can't say I haven't. Don't you dare hint such a thing; do you hear?"

"I never thought of doing so, my dear."

"Well, don't, that's all. The worry of being out here in this wilderness is enough, without you always interfering and messing things up. But let's go back to the camp and think about it all, before you make me say something I might be sorry for. And I'd advise you to speak to Mr. Tressider; it's your place."

Sam was standing on the brink of a deep gorge, which cut clear across his land. A tiny rivulet ran along the bottom. A hawk banked and dived close

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to the vivid green grass away down below. It was a quarter of a mile across to the opposite edge of the ravine, which was a good hundred yards deep. This, then, accounted for the couple of wavy lines they had seen on Barr's large-scale map in his cabin on the *Lake Manitoba*.

Sam gazed into the coulee. "I don't know anythink abaht land," he mused, "but this 'ere bit looks funny ter me." He was just a shade disappointed. His eyes roamed keenly all about, noticing the amazing amount of elbow-room there was everywhere. "Any'ow," he summed up to himself, "it's 'eaps better 'n Bermondsey." He wandered back to the wagon.

Presently Esther and Bert, both intensely happy, struggled hand in hand up the slope of the ravine, the former carrying a big bouquet of Saskatoon blossoms and wild pea flowers. They hadn't decided where to build. There were too many sites.

Mrs. Trailey continued looking round. Her expression was enigmatic. "Let's be getting back to the camp," she said succinctly. William Trailey's head drooped on his breast.

Bert's eyes already reflected the region's sweeping distances. "Land's satisfactory, eh, Sam?" he commented. "Everything's all bona fide and serene now, don't you think?" He was in high spirits.

Sam said "'e didn't think very much of that deep

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gultch over there, nor of its blinkin' bony fidos neither, but the land 'ud do quite nicely fer 'im."

Esther seemed incapable of expressing herself. Bert was still holding her hand. Then they tumbled aboard again, and, following their own tracks in the grass, retraced their course to Headquarters Camp.

Before retiring to bed, Bert wrote to his mother.

"BRITANNIA, N.W.T.

"30th May, 1903.

"Dear Mother:

"At last we are arrived. We've been to see our land to-day—a fine stretch. Sam is still with me. He is a splendid little chap, but a little cynical with living in London so much.

"We joined fortunes with another party at Saskatoon, the Traileys. They are very respectable people. The old gentleman was an insurance superintendent or something back in England, but he is very charming. They have a daughter, mother; the sweetest, the most divine creature imaginable. Don't be surprised when I tell you that we are thinking of getting married in a few weeks' time; and I am writing this partly with the idea of asking you to send me two rings. If you get them to fit your own finger, I think that will be about the correct size. Please choose a dress ring with plenty of diamonds in it; you should be able to buy a splendid one for seventy-five pounds or so. The

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wedding ring doesn't matter so much. Do not delay things any longer than you can help, mother, because, strictly speaking, you are holding up our marriage.

"I enclose an old photograph of Esther (your future daughter-in-law's name, by the way), but it is not a good one of her. She is an angel, and no picture could do her justice. More next time. Love to dad, and the girls.

"Your very affectionate son,

"BERTIE.

"P.S. I have promised Esther that when we are settled, and the farm is beginning to pay, I shall bring her to England for a holiday—which will most likely be some time next year."

DATE DUE SLIP

DUE RUTH APR 30 1988	
JUL 27 RETURN	JUN 31 RETURN
MAY 19 1988	RETURN APR 12 '00
APR 12 RETURN	
DUE RUTH APR 30 1989	
MAY 12 RETURN	
DUE RUTH APR 30 1991	
DUE RUTH APR 30 '91	
DUE RUTH NOV 27 '92	
NOV 17 '92	
DUE RUTH MAR 04 '93	
MAY 17 '93	
MAY 17 '93	

